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**An exploration of students' experiences and  
interpretations of an internationalisation policy  
implemented in a Chinese university: A case study**

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Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Education

University of Durham

School of Education

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## Abstract

This case study centres on the internationalisation policies of a Chinese university—University X—and examines how they are experienced and perceived by both this university's international and home students. The study focuses on how the institutional system promotes not only the students' development of intercultural communicative competence, but also their understanding and perceptions of their intercultural communication experience within this context.

The empirical findings of this study show first that 1) the internationalisation policies of this specific Chinese university relate to specific five areas. These relate to: the introduction of high-quality international education resources; attracting foreign students; faculty development; extracurricular (intercultural) activities; and management of the university's administration system. The university's policy initiatives and strategies correspond with three aspects of the theories that relate to the internationalisation of higher education. These are: curriculum internationalisation; internationalisation at home; and, intercultural dialogue; 2) students' experiences of the institutional system in terms of their perceptions of: their teachers and learning experience; their intercultural communication experience inside the classroom; their intercultural communication experience outside the classroom and within the wider community; and, their experiences with the university's administrative system; and, 3) the variety of factors that influence both Chinese and international students' development of intercultural competence and their understanding of intercultural communication experience with one another. These include: language issues; differences in motivation and life style; attitudes towards intercultural communication; and, rapport with the local community.

The study's findings provide valuable insights into the development of students' intercultural competence as a result of the institution's internationalisation policy, and have practical implications for higher education internationalisation, especially in the context of China.



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## Abbreviations

MOE	Ministry of Education
ICC	Intercultural Communicative Competence
CFL	Chinese as A Foreign Language
WTO	World Trade Organization
OIR	Office of International Relations
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching



## Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for any other awards or degree.





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## Dedication

*This thesis is dedicated to my father and mother without whose constant support I could not be able to complete this thesis.*



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## Chapter One: Introduction

Using a case study research approach, this thesis seeks to explore the effectiveness of the internationalisation policy initiatives designed by one Chinese university to promote its students' intercultural understanding and communicative competence. Taking Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) as its theoretical framework together with theories within the fields of intercultural communication and curriculum internationalisation, this study aims to gain an understanding of both Chinese and international students' intercultural communication experience and their perceptions with regard to the institutional system used to promote their intercultural understanding and communication. In so doing, this research attempts to improve existing understanding of the focus of intercultural communicative competence on the one hand, and to inform the internationalisation progress of Chinese higher education on the other.

### 1.1 Background of the study

As a response to the intensity of globalisation, many higher education institutions around the world have been targeting their internationalisation policy initiatives at equipping their graduates with global perspectives and communicative competence (Deardorff & Jones, 2012, p. 283). As a result, the increasing focus on intercultural outcomes has meant that these elements have been absorbed into higher educational goals and objectives, particularly those relating to joint degree programmes, foreign language education and study abroad programmes, as these intercultural outcomes are viewed as indicators of students' learning progression and the institutions' internationalisation efforts (Sinicrope, Norris, & Watanabe, 2007). Accordingly, education policy makers are required to integrate students' intercultural competence development into their evaluation processes as an indicator of their internationalisation learning outcome, an outcome, which, in turn, provides meaningful implications that facilitate the overall improvement and strengthening of educational programmes and curricula (Deardorff, 2004).

Given its growing significance in cultivating global citizens and in indicating the achievement of an institution's internationalisation efforts, the development of intercultural competence has become even more imperative than ever before in terms of the contributions it can make to advancing not only the internationalisation policies and practices of higher education institutions, but also improving students' learning outcomes (Deardorff, 2011).

## 1.2 Development of higher education internationalisation in China

The restructuring of Chinese higher education to develop talent and benchmark it with world-class standards has inevitably triggered several transformative higher education policies which may lead to an enhancement of China's higher education position in the world's university rankings. Shortly after the economic reform and "open-door" policy in 1978, the Chinese government made several major reforms relating to the function and powers of higher education. These reforms included abandoning its centralised policy regarding the university admissions and job assigning systems; initiating a user-pays tuition system; encouraging cooperation and the establishment of exchange programmes with foreign universities, and, most importantly, enacting Project 211 and Project 985 in an attempt to develop world-class universities (Li, 2010).

Driven by the global trend towards a knowledge economy and the prosperity brought about by the economic reforms and the opening-up policy initiated in 1978, the central government in China recognised the importance of educational progress and scientific advancement as a means of propelling the nation's economic development and the international competitiveness of the whole country (Chen, 1999). As a consequence, several initiatives were enacted and implemented to promote the higher education internationalisation process and to enable some of China's leading universities to attain a higher position in the higher education global ranking league. With the exception of the policies around involvement in international exchange and collaboration with institutions in developed countries, the most remarkable policies enacted by the central government for the development of higher education were Project 211 and Project 985. These initiatives explicitly reflected the government's endeavour to benchmark Chinese higher education providers with world-class universities by focusing limited investment and support on a few leading Chinese institutions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Mok & Chan, 2008). In line with the development aims of Project 211 and Project 985, China's Ministry of Education (MOE) suggests not only that input needs to be increased and that specific strategies need be devoted to the construction of advanced universities and disciplines, but also that major attention should be paid to the enhancement of students' learning outcomes and personal development (MOE & MOF, 2010).

Since that time, a huge amount of extra funds from central and local government and also from nonstate actors has been invested into the targeted universities, with the purpose of: first, improving management and operation mechanisms, as well as assessment systems by recruiting a group of expert managerial personnel and teaching staff from around the world; secondly, by

enhancing the construction of infrastructures such as network and digital equipment, and research levels; and, finally, accelerating international cooperation and exchange with first-class universities through invitations to prestigious scholars and professors, collaborative research activities, and attracting international students (MOE & MOF, 2010).

### 1.3 The challenges of the internationalisation process and the research problems

The substantial governmental policy initiatives on higher education internationalisation outlined above appear to have produced preliminary achievements. For example, two of China's top universities, Peking University and Tsinghua University, have improved their world university ranking and are now listed among the world's top 100 universities. In addition, increasing numbers of international joint programmes and research centres have been established at China's leading universities. Nevertheless, obstacles that may hinder the improvement of the internationalisation process remain, and these create international concern regarding Chinese higher education quality assurance issues.

Concerns over: the brain drain; insufficient numbers of international students on university campuses compared with their educational counterparts in developed countries (The OECD, 2011); excessive emphasis on research performance and scientific achievement; blind adoption of Western pedagogic and managerial norms and standards can all be listed among the top risks that threaten the development of China's higher education internationalisation. These problems have also, in turn, driven higher education institutions in China, especially the country's leading universities, to launch effective policies: 1) to attract international students from diverse ethnic backgrounds from around the world who can improve the English proficiency and intercultural understanding of home students (China Daily, 2013); 2) to enhance the welfare and working conditions for academics to integrate talented faculty from both at home and abroad (Chen, 2011); 3) to draw on effective teaching methods, materials, and administrative patterns from Western countries that are compatible with Chinese teaching and learning conventions (Huang, 2003); and, 4) to cultivate global citizens who are not only capable of conducting scientific research, but also of communicating and behaving effectively in a globalised society (Huang, 2007). Although the strategic efforts employed to date have obtained some preliminary achievements in term of, for example, hosting increasing numbers of international students on the campuses of key, leading universities in China—which has led to a promotion of intercultural understanding and contacts with other universities in developed countries—there yet appear to be a number of dilemmas facing higher education institutions when it comes to enacting and implementing effective strategies and activities. The major problem lies in the fact

that research evidence indicates a downtrend in terms of personal interaction between students from different cultural backgrounds (Summers & Volet, 2008). Factors identified as impeding students' development of intercultural competences in the academic environment include language barriers, common stereotypes, poor intercultural relational skills, and fear of diminished grades (Kimmel & Volet, 2010). Thus, there is a research need to investigate the effectiveness of strategic efforts designed to promote intercultural contacts and the development of student intercultural competence within the Chinese higher education context. In addition, previous research on the internationalisation of high education has been criticised for its over-emphasis on the output dimensions of internationalisation policy, such as the number of joint research programmes and students studying abroad (Beerkens et al., 2010), or on economic benefits and partnerships established as a result of internationalisation strategies (Deardorff & van Gaalen, 2012, p. 167). Issues relating to the effectiveness of internationalisation policy and practice on students' development of intercultural knowledge and skills has rarely been addressed (Deardorff & van Gaalen, 2012, p. 167). Thus, it seems imperative that further research is undertaken to shed new light on such research areas.

Previous research findings have highlighted the ways in which international students' intercultural experiences affect evaluation of the quality of academic provision, and also the impacts of determining factors such as language proficiency, provision of institutional support, and the extent of the impact of social contacts within or outside the university campus on the level of students' personal development and academic achievements (Gu, Schweisfurth, & Day, 2010). However, despite the amount of research that has been carried out to assess students' intercultural competence, the effectiveness of internationalisation policies on the development of intercultural competence remains underresearched, as there appears to be little documented research relating to the impacts of stated internationalisation policies on stakeholders at all levels. In particular, there is a lack of research into students' experiences and their perceptions of institutional strategies that aim to develop their intercultural competence. In addition, it has also been argued (Deardorff, 2006) that few higher education institutions have developed effective methods to evaluate the intercultural competence which is purported to be the outcome of their internationalisation policy and practice. Consequently, we have insufficient information with regard to the effectiveness of internationalisation endeavours in terms of students' learning outcomes and self-development.

#### 1.4 Aims of the Study

The findings from previous studies have highlighted the contributions that investigating international students' intercultural experiences have made on evaluating the quality of academic provision, and the impacts of determining factors such as language proficiency,

provision of institutional support, and the extent to which social contact within or outside the university campus impacts on the levels of students' personal development and academic achievements (Gu et al., 2010).

Since this research focuses on students' intercultural competence as an outcome of the internationalisation efforts of Chinese higher education, it is necessary to figure out how the university's internationalisation policies address issues related to the improvement of intercultural competence. The initial objective for this study is, therefore, to evaluate the activities that are implemented and students' perceptions of their effectiveness. The term 'evaluate' here refers in particular to the 'process evaluation', which according to Scheirer (1994), 'verifies what the programme is and whether or not it is delivered as intended to the target recipient'. The qualitative process evaluation may also enable the researcher to explore, in great detail, the efficacy of the organization and delivery of a programme through detailed understanding of multiple perspectives. To that end, this study embarks, in the context of the Chinese higher education system, upon a critical review of the internationalisation policy of University X and examines its strategies and activities associated with promoting students' intercultural communication.

As discussed previously, intercultural competence, one of the prominent outcomes of international higher education, has taken on increasing importance in terms of indicating the level of success of an institution's internationalisation policy (Deardorff, 2006), and the capacity of the institution to prepare "global-ready" graduates (Caruana, 2010). By examining the factors that constitute and contribute to students' intercultural competence, and by exploring how such factors align with the institution's internationalisation policy and practice within the context of the contemporary debate over the improvement of internationalisation policy in higher education, the present study is framed so as to capture the full range of students' experiences and perceptions on the development of intercultural competence. One of this study's further aims is, therefore, to offer China's higher education institutions an in-depth understanding of how the implementation of an internationalisation policy is viewed through the lenses of both home and international students in one particular university. More specifically, the principal objective of the study is to first identify what activities, aspects, and conditions of the university's policies facilitate or inhibit students' development of intercultural competence. Drawing on Byram's ICC model and other theories within the fields of intercultural understanding and communication, this study also seeks to gain a comprehensive understanding of the intercultural communication experience of both home and international students. Using both the participants' self-reporting and cognitive reflection, this study empirically tracks the progression of students' acquisition of intercultural competence. In addition, it identifies gaps

and areas for institutional improvement. It is also assumed that implications can be drawn through thematic analysis of the participants' accounts and that these ideas will help to inform the implementation of the internationalisation goals and strategies of University X as it seeks to promote its students' intercultural communication experience.

### 1.5 Significance of the Study

It is based on the purpose of the research that the current study attends to associate the individual to the institution by concentrating on the internationalisation policies and interventions of the specific institution as the context and conditions, and to examine its implementation and impacts through the lens and an understanding of the recipients' reflection of their intercultural communication experience. The significance of conducting such phenomenological research lies in its prospective contribution to the social, institutional, and research aspects of higher education internationalisation.

First, given the difficulty of arriving at a consensus definition of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006), it seems more fruitful to explore students' intercultural experiences as part of the combined effects of studying abroad or interacting with international students. By taking such an approach, the study can also contribute to our understanding of the effectiveness of the University X's internationalisation policies and practices. It is also expected that increased knowledge of the perceptions of the receivers of institutional policies will lead to improvements in teaching and administrative practices.

Second, given that previous research has concentrated more on quantitative results and less on providing a theoretical model for analysing the consistency of internationalisation policies and the results of their implementation, this study's comparison and examination of the relationship between 'policy' and 'experience' in terms of consistency means that this descriptive and comprehensive study can shed new light on the qualitative outcomes of such policies.

Third, through its exploration of coincidence and dissonance between documented internationalisation policies and University X's implemented activities, the present study provides added significance by making sense of the experiences of stakeholders who are targeted as recipients of internationalisation efforts.

Fourth, this study contributes to University X's endeavours and efforts to internationalise its curriculum. It forms part of University X's self-assessment efforts regarding its internationalisation policy and, therefore, its results align with the national policy for quality assurance of higher education and the mission of central government to build a world-class

university. The particular focus of this study on student' experiences and perspectives is also consistent with the essential mission and goals of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan with regard to cultivating high-quality graduates. The results of a study such as this one, therefore, provide evidence that University X's administrators and decision-makers can use to review the university's fulfillment of its internationalisation brief, to examine the stage it has reached in the development of its 211 and 985 Projects planning, and to take further actions to improve its current situation and move on to a better level on the internationalisation cube.

Finally, given University X's consistent allegiance to the government's demand to establish a world-class university and to promoting internationalisation processes in higher education, it is envisaged that this study could provide constructive implications for the operationalisation of the internationalisation process. It is also hoped that the results of this study will enable policy-makers and administrators of University X to identify the gap between their strategic planning and policies, and their actual appropriateness and effectiveness for various stakeholders, and, therefore, allow those policy-makers to review and address policies and strategies that fail to function appropriately.

## 1.6 Definition of Key Terms

### **Internationalisation**

There is no denying the fact that the conceptual understanding of internationalisation has undergone evolutionary processes as a response to the global trends in higher education, because the prevailing impact of internationalisation on higher education did not become a core factor that was closely associated with the reputation of institutions, competitiveness, the manpower of the nation state, and social prosperity until the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Rumbley, Altbach, & Reisberg, 2012). The recent trend of moving away from a previous focus on theories of internationalisation to considering its practical implementations at the institutional level has meant that the concept of internationalisation has become more attached to the functioning of higher education institutions. Therefore, as this study is concerned with the operationalisation of higher education, Knight's (2003, p. 2) definition, which illustrates internationalisation as a "process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension in the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education", serves as a guide for this study and enables it to categorise the exploration of University X's internationalisation processes into purpose (policies), functions (practices) and delivery (impacts).

### **Internationalisation policy**

Although there seems to be no clear-cut definition of the concept of “internationalisation policy”, the term is used in this study to refer to institutional policy that pertains to the “international” dimension of a university, and which serves and contributes to the overall development of the university. Thus, an “international dimension”, according to Wächter (1999), could include the teaching, research, and public service function of a university, as manifested in various activities, such as joint research programmes, student and staff mobility projects, specific programmes targeted at foreign students, and administrative support, and which are, preferably, implemented by staff at the institution’s international office.

Given that this study’s purpose is to investigate the effectiveness and impacts of institutional policy on the development of students’ intercultural competence, the concept of internationalisation policy refers mainly to the documented strategies and activities encompassed within the policy files of the target institution that aim to fulfil the objective of improving students’ intercultural competence.

### **Intercultural competence**

The debate around delineating an agreed-on definition of intercultural competence and what constitutes such a concept has received particular attention from intercultural scholars and higher education administrators. According to Deardorff (2006), the definition seen as the most appropriate for designing and implementing internationalisation strategies is Byram’s (1997) work. Byram describes intercultural competence as “knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others’ values, beliefs, and behaviours; and relativizing one’s self. Linguistic competence plays a key role” (p. 34). The present study also adopts Byram’s definition as the primary paradigm to investigate students’ acquisition of intercultural competence as a result of their institutions’ internationalisation policy and practice. The components embedded within such a concept also serve as major issues to explore.

## **1.7 Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis comprises seven chapters. The first chapter delineates the context, aims of the study, and states the rationale for selecting the particular institution studied. It then discusses the significance of the present study and defines its key terms. The chapter concludes with an overview of the structure of the whole thesis.

Chapter 2 is the Literature Review. It starts with a critical discussion of theoretical concepts related to internationalisation and intercultural competence. It examines different ways in which



key terms are defined. Contended frameworks of intercultural competence and the importance of developing intercultural competence as an outcome of students' university education are discussed. Furthermore, this discussion locates the data collection and analysis of this study.

The chapter then moves on to a critical review of the empirical research concerning internationalisation and the development of intercultural competence in the Chinese higher education context. A discussion of the methodologies and key findings of those studies is also presented. It also serves to identify major trends and relationships between studies. This chapter ends by setting out the study's three major research questions, which provide a theoretical framework for the whole research.

Methodology is discussed in Chapter 3. The chapter begins with the rationale for choosing the social constructionist paradigm and a case study approach. Next, it provides a detailed description and discussion of the study's data collection instruments, including documents and semistructured interviews, and procedures. A rationale for adopting thematic analysis and an explanation of the study's data analysis processes come at the end of this chapter, along with a discussion of the researcher's reflexivity and the ethical issues involved throughout the research process.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 integrate and present the findings and discussion of the collected data. Here, the research results, along with their critical discussion, are framed in response to the research questions, with one chapter focusing on each question. Chapter 4 presents a review of the internationalisation policy of University X that is designed to promote students' intercultural understanding and communication. Chapter 5 first presents the participants' experience and perception with regard to the institutional system that is associated with its internationalisation policy. It then makes a comparison between the 'experience' and the 'policy' in order to evaluate the extent to which relevant issues in the policy initiatives of University X promote students' development of intercultural communicative competence. Chapter 6 presents the students' experience and understanding of their intercultural communication experience on and outside campus. By identifying social, educational, and personal factors that exert an influence on students' development of intercultural competence, this chapter indicates ways in which to improve internationalisation.

The final chapter concludes the whole thesis. First, it summarises key issues within each chapter and how they relate to the three main research questions. Secondly, it discusses the contributions that this study makes to the existing theories on intercultural communication and internationalisation. Thirdly, practical and educational implications are extracted to enable policy-makers and higher education institutions in China to make improvements that can

enhance the quality of their teaching and policy-making processes. Methodological suggestions for further research on intercultural and international policy are also provided. The Conclusion chapter ends with a discussion of the key limitations of the research. These relate to the research methodology; the researcher's personal bias; the distinctive cultural backgrounds and personal characteristics of the participants; and, the restriction of the research setting.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

As stated in the opening chapter, in this study I aim to explore how the policy of one particular Chinese university—referred to as University X—endeavours to develop intercultural learning and communication in its students (both international and home). I also seek to identify the extent to which the university's institutional support facilitates (or fails to facilitate) students' intercultural learning and communication. To address these aims, I first provide a brief overview of approaches to internationalisation policy in the higher education section in the broader sense (Section 2.1). I next elaborate on the theoretical concept of intercultural competence and provide a brief overview of its models. I next present the rationale for adopting Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence as a theoretical framework for understanding students' intercultural communication experience and its limitations (Section 2.2). Subsequently, I review existing research on foreign language education and intercultural communication in terms of: 1) foreign language education in China; 2) concepts and theories of foreign language education and intercultural communication; and, 3) empirical studies on students' language learning and intercultural communication in China (Section 2.3). The chapter concludes with the study's research questions (Section 2.4).

### 2.1 Approaches to the internationalisation of higher education

In accordance with the aims of this study, that is, to investigate the effectiveness of the internationalisation policies of University X on students' development of intercultural competence, it is important to first present a brief review of the approaches to higher education internationalisation that are associated with promoting students' intercultural learning and communication. To that end, I review three approaches to internationalisation: 1) curriculum internationalisation; 2) internationalisation at home; and, 3) intercultural dialogue.

#### 2.1.1 Curriculum Internationalisation

Throughout its history, and especially since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there has been a growing recognition that changes need to be made to the way that the internationalisation curriculum operates. In recognition of the limited effects that student mobility would have on the overall learning outcomes of the whole student body, a series of internationalisation schemes and associations have emerged across the world. These focus on involving faculty members within the institution in the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the move to

internationalise the curriculum, because these individuals are deemed to play a significant role in delivering the student learning curriculum (Leask & Beelen, 2009). Reflecting the increased linkage made in the literature between the concept of internationalisation, intercultural competencies, and the internationalisation of the curriculum, the professional demand for educators to prepare students to compete in a globalised society has been targeted at their ability to translate their own world-mindedness and intercultural competence into their teaching practices. The crucial role that faculty staff and administrators are supposed to take on in building personal relationships with international students and managing academic progress has also been taken into account and embedded in strategies of the internationalised curriculum. Teachers with overseas learning or teaching experience are highly valued by both institution administrators and international students themselves (Clifford, 2010) in a number of areas. These include their potential openness and respect for cultural differences; their being more flexible in teaching approaches; their having empathy with and understanding of the difficulties that international students are confronted with in adapting to the norms and interactive patterns of the new culture; and, their consequent ability to provide assistance appropriate to students' needs.

Given the fact that only a small portion of university students are eligible to study abroad, an internationalised curriculum inevitably benefits all, especially nonmobile home students, in terms of broadening their horizons and developing skills in response to the overwhelming forces of globalisation (Brewer & Leask, 2012).

The OECD's definition of the internationalised curriculum presented below has been widely recognised and accepted. It is:

A curriculum with an international orientation in content and/or form, aimed at preparing students for performing (professionally/socially) in an international and multicultural context and designed for domestic and/or foreign students. (p. 9)

Critics of internationalising the curriculum focus mainly on the tension between the local and the global, and on Western educational models in particular. Thus, decision-making about the internationalisation efforts and agenda in relation to local conditions is crucial, especially for Asian countries, if they are to avoid "falling into traps of internationalisation" (Mok, 2007). Strategies such as student mobility have also been criticised as having limited or no impact on faculty practices, and as a consequence, failing to trigger change in teaching and learning locally (Mestenhauser, 1998). Brewer and Leask (2012) argue that, although it may promote students' intercultural experience and perspectives, the recruitment of international faculty members is still limited. It is also highly subjective, if their professional skills and conceptions

of internationalisation do not align with the larger institution by which they are employed. Brewer and Leask (2012) also argued that curriculum internationalisation strategies and their associated goals and learning outcomes may differ across different disciplines. For example, Applebaum, Friedler, Ortiz, and Wolff (2009) found that mathematics curriculum innovation focuses more on the cultural aspects of knowledge within maths history. Science curricula are more likely to be driven by commercial interests and led by Western science and technology. Science curricula should, therefore, be devised to cater to the diverse needs of learners from different cultures and regions, and to prepare students to be “flexible, adaptive, and reflective problem solvers who can conduct community-based as well as industry-based investigations” (Brewer & Leask, 2012, p. 256). However, certain commonalities still exist within discipline-specific approaches to curriculum internationalisation, with the development of international perspectives and intercultural competence, although being more instrument-oriented, being seen as integral of the entire internationalisation schemata and beneficial for individual development (Brewer & Leask, 2012).

Within the broader arena of study abroad programmes, numerous researchers support the idea that interventions and supports which are provided successively before, during, and after students’ study abroad would give rise to more robust learning outcomes. Hence, more importance is attached to the integration of such a scheme into students’ ongoing learning programmes once they return to their home countries (Deardorff, 2008; Engle & Engle, 2002; Savicki, 2008; Vande Berg, 2007; Brewer & Cunningham, 2010). In terms of the development of intercultural competencies in particular, interventions that are provided during students’ study abroad periods, such as “experiential learning, structured reflection, opportunities to engage with host nationals” (Paige & Goode, 2009; Vande Berg, 2007), prove to be more productive. Reports from students about their own international experience also reflect the significant advantage of intercultural contacts and international learning outside the classroom through, for instance, programmes devised for general education and service learning (Brewer & Leask, 2012). Such findings resonate with Kim’s study (2012). By identifying those variables within the environmental arena which help to define the relative degrees of ‘push-and-pull’ that a given host environment presents to the individual, Kim argues that individuals who perceive the receiving environment as welcoming, hospitable, and tolerant are more likely to show positive engagement and integration with the host culture. Therefore, in order for intercultural communicators to develop qualified interpersonal relationships, it is essential for them to first identify distinguishing cultural group membership factors such as beliefs, norms, and habitual behaviours, and, then to constructively develop knowledge and skills to manage potential intercultural misunderstanding or conflicts about them. As Jackson (2012) suggests, programmes seeking to build in experiential activities that require sustained intercultural contact

and relationships with people who have been socialised in a different cultural environment may enable sojourners to apply their intercultural communication skills and to evolve knowledge and local sociopragmatic norms, provided there is sufficient scaffolding and ongoing support. Such programmes can also help newcomers develop a sense of belonging in the host environment, thereby facilitating both language acquisition and intercultural learning and communication.

### 2.1.2 Internationalisation at home

Both EU and U.S. institutions have recently oriented their attention towards “internationalisation at home”, a concept that is preconditioned by and mainly concerned with the vast majority of nonmobile domestic students. Internationalisation at home aims to promote, through a range of academic and social policies and support, the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that are essential for students to become global citizens, and to create an intercultural environment where positive cross-cultural contacts may occur. As a consequence, the international classroom plays an increasingly significant role as the main site in which such a process can take place (Leask, 2007).

Studies on participants’ perspectives and experience of the international classroom more often than not place their stress on international students, and less often, on teaching staff (Carroll & Ryan, 2005; Trahar, 2007). Issues around home students’ intercultural learning and integration seldom feature in the research agenda. Harrison and Peacock (2010) did, however, investigate home students’ experience and perception on intercultural communication. They found that the presence of large numbers of international students places more pressure on home students’ workload, especially when new knowledge, viewpoints, teaching approaches, and ways of thinking inevitably become immersed in their routine learning experience. According to Harrison and Peacock (2010), home students also experienced anxiety and frustration regarding what they perceived as the uncooperative performance of international students. These feelings resulted in fewer social relationships outside the classroom. Volet and Ang’s (1998) findings also revealed that language still acts as the primary and dominant barrier to mutual understanding and interpersonal relationships. Harrison and Peacock’s (2010) study, which noted the relative indifference and alienation on the part of local students felt by international students, resonates with similar work exploring international students’ perceptions of their local partners in Australia, as well as Australian students’ accounts of their resistance and discomfort while communicating with people whose first language is not English (Clifford, 2010). Clifford (2010) found, moreover, that the lack of interaction between international and home students in and out of class also contradicted with students’ expectations and awareness of the significance

of cross-cultural contacts in terms of promoting their intercultural understanding and international perspectives.

However, research evidence shows that the mere existence of international students will not guarantee increased intercultural engagement between international and home students. For example, Leask (2010) notes that strategies relating to enrolment of international students may run the risk of overlooking the intercultural experience and international learning outcomes of domestic students. For that reason, intentional approaches, such as a mentoring scheme, which are designed to enhance intercultural encounters between both international and home students inside and outside the classroom are advocated. Harrison and Peacock (2010) also point out that little significant cultural change regarding the student-institution relationship has been found. Furthermore, despite of the internationalisation of the curriculum and pedagogical updates, there is still not much evidence of international students making the perceptive shift from being academic tourists to autonomous agents or cooperative partners who are being fully involved in the intercultural communication process “as a source of cultural capital and intentional diversity” (Brown & Jones, 2007, p. 2). International students also appear to be having an ongoing unsatisfactory experience as regards their lack of integration with local students. This dissatisfaction results in their feeling isolated, and it affects their competence development and international experience overall (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001; Middlehurst & Woodfield, 2007). A positive correlation has also been found between the students’ adaptive integration into the host culture and their overall satisfaction with both the learning experience and social life (Ward et al., 2005). Leask’s study (2007) of both home and international students’ lived experience of interaction has revealed a gulf between internationalisation at home policies and the actual interactive experience between these two groups. Although set in the context of UK universities, this study’s findings may have implications for institutions worldwide.

In view of the potential challenges that result from merely concentrating on the diversity of the student population and from enhancing the number of academic programmes for international students, I argue that an overweighed strategic emphasis on Chinese top universities’ increasing their international student numbers may result in their overlooking those students’ lived intercultural experience and the quality of their overall international learning outcomes. I will discuss these issues in detail in chapter 4.

### 2.1.3 Intercultural dialogue

Intercultural dialogue, as a strategic goal, has been instilled into higher education

internationalisation policy in Europe, and has gained prime importance in terms of managing cultural diversity on campus (Castro, Woodin, Lundgren & Byram, 2016). This move emanated conceptually from de Witt's (2002) advocacy of integrating an intercultural dimension into a university's objectives.

The British Council defines intercultural dialogue as follows:

Intercultural dialogue is a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange or interaction between individuals, groups and organisations with different cultural backgrounds or worldviews. Among its aims are: to develop a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and practices; to increase participation and the freedom and ability to make choices; to foster equality; and to enhance creative processes. (The British Council, 2013, p. 46)

According to Bergan and Restoueix (2009), intercultural dialogue activities are a *sine qua non*, if a university is to perform its fundamental remit successfully. Accordingly, universities' endeavours to promote intercultural dialogue concentrate mainly on: 1) the support that the university administration accords to students in terms of providing them with information on practical problems, accommodation, study guidance, the various permits they may need, and, sometimes, pastoral care; 2) linguistic support through training courses in the host country's language and measures that facilitate students' adjustment to the teaching methods of the given country, or giving students the option to have part of the syllabus taught in a *lingua franca*, usually English. However, Bergan and Restoueix (2009) argue that such measures are limited in that they engender practical bases for foreign students' adjustment and intercultural communication at a preliminary level only, and so cannot ensure effective and ongoing intercultural dialogue.

A further practical initiative pinpointed by Bergan and Restoueix (2009) that enlightens my research is their suggestion of helping international students to connect better with the local cultural environment by providing opportunities for direct contact with local traditions and everyday cultural life—for example, through ad hoc lectures, audiovisual presentations and courses. The priority they grant to the psychological climate on campus, which they assume will play a significant part in the development of intercultural dialogue, addresses the idea that the specific pressures encountered by foreign students and their management of the minutiae of everyday academic life can be improved by institutional strategic choices and a promotion of initiatives pertaining to intercultural dialogue, such as social events and get-togethers by groups (such as student clubs) and individuals, with the aim of genuinely integrating minority groups (foreign students, but also those from national ethnic minorities) into everyday academic life (Bergan & Restoueix, 2009).



Although the importance attached to intercultural dialogue as a way of negotiating positions of difference and working through conflict towards peace, reconciliation, and democracy has been widely acknowledged, the concept has been criticised for its failure to recognise the similarities people share in encounters. My study, therefore, seeks to explore such significant factors, especially in making sense of home and international students' intercultural communication experience. By drawing on ways of bridging gaps between internationalisation and intercultural communication, the present study seeks to investigate the extent of the effectiveness of interventions and support pertaining to institution's internationalisation policy. Thus, this thesis investigates how these have facilitated both international and home students' development of intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills on the one hand, and explores the ways by which institutional support promotes intercultural communication among its international student population, and more importantly their intercultural encounters with domestic students, on the other. To make sense of the development of intercultural competence in a broader sense, the next section will elaborate theories and models of intercultural competence.

## 2.2 Theories and models of intercultural competence

This section first presents the definition of intercultural competence which was used as the theoretical basis of this study and which guides the whole research. It then offers a brief overview of the models of intercultural competence and the rationale for choosing Byram's model for the theoretical framework of my study. Finally, it discusses in detail the five *savoirs* in Byram's model, and probes its limitations.

### 2.2.1 Definition of intercultural competence

As a response to the constant debate over a common definition of intercultural competence, Deardorff (2004) surveyed 23 intercultural communication experts in an effort to formulate a consensus definition for the term. Three constructs were prioritised among those elements that are considered constitutive of intercultural competence. These are: "awareness, valuing and understanding of cultural differences; experiencing other cultures; and self-awareness of one's own culture" (Deardorff, 2004, p. 247). In terms of the relevance of intercultural competence to the internationalisation policy and strategies of higher education institutions, a definition has finally been agreed on: "Knowledge of others, knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativising one's self. Linguistic competence plays a key role" (Byram, 1997, p. 34).

Drawing on the general concern over Byram's definition among intercultural experts, it appears that significant attention has been given to the contribution of language in intercultural encounters, which leads to Deardorff's (2004) broad definition of intercultural competence as: "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes" (p. 194). To relate such a definition with the concept of intercultural communication, Fantini (2007) argues that the notion of intercultural competence implies that, in order for intercultural encounters and communication to be effective and appropriate, a complexity of abilities presuppose the competence construction process. To elaborate the meaning embedded in the terms 'effective' and 'appropriate', Fantini relates the notion of 'effective' to one's own perception and feeling in respect for one's behaviours and performance in intercultural encounter, and the concept of 'appropriate' as being associated with the extent to which one's behaviour will be perceptually accepted and understood by members of the host community. To sum up, it could be argued that the transition from intercultural communication to well-developed intercultural communicative competence is scaffolded through a complex mixture of intercultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills, where language plays a key role in intercultural encounters. This line of thinking gave rise to the current research inspiration to investigate the linkage between an institution's internationalisation strategies and their effects in promoting 'effective' and 'appropriate' intercultural communication.

### 2.2.2 Models of Intercultural Competence

In accordance with Deardorff's (2004) broad definition and also by building on Fantini's (2007) discussion on the relation between intercultural communication and intercultural communicative competence, quite a number of models for intercultural competence that could serve this study's various research purposes emerged. Byram's model prioritises the need for linguistic competence in effective intercultural communication; Deardorff's (2008) process model of intercultural competence gives more attention to internal shifts in the individual which result from ongoing movement from "the individual level of attitudes/personal attributes to the interactive cultural level in regard to the outcomes". Bennett's (1998) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity accentuates personal growth and the cultivation of an intercultural mindset, and theorises an individual's moving from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism.

Despite its advantages in identifying individuals' evolutionary and systematic progress towards intercultural competence during their period of residence abroad, the developmental model is still criticised as being "correspondingly weak in specifying the interpersonal and intercultural

competence traits that facilitate or moderate the course of such evolution” (Spitzberg & Changnon 2009, p. 24).

Furthermore, Deardorff’s model, although useful for assessing intercultural competence, has been criticised as failing to address the physiological and emotional aspects of communication, communication occurring in intercultural relationships, and the location of intercultural competence itself, challenge research studies that foregrounds ‘relationality’, a notion that is embedded and prioritised in most East-Asian cultures (Deardorff, 2009).

### 2.2.3 Rationale for choosing Byram’s model of intercultural communicative competence

Recognising the complexity of linguistic and cultural factors that can be attributed to effective intercultural transition, understanding, and communication while making sense of and analysing intercultural communication, I adopted Byram’s model as the theoretical framework of my research. Since on the one hand, those who participated in my research were either Chinese postgraduate students or international students studying Chinese language and culture in University X, language proficiency played a vital role in their mutual understanding and communicative activities. On the other hand, the priority Byram’s model gives to critical cultural awareness, along with Guilherme’s (2000) recommendation for its being incorporated into foreign language education and intercultural communication laid a dialectical and analytical foundation for understanding and evaluating students’ experience of intercultural communication because it draws attention to people’s identification, critical and reflective evaluation of differences and similarities between cultural norms, and perspectives and practices of their own country and those of the host.

In line with the notion of second language socialisation and also building on the importance of second or foreign language education found in Byram’s model and also the expanded notions of communicative competence put forward by other linguistic researchers such as Bachman (1990) and Canale and Swain (1980), who conceptualise communicative competence as the linguistic knowledge and culture-specific language skills that enable one to communicate in a proper way in a specific cultural and social community, my research will first explore to what extent students’ host language knowledge and communicative skills can support (or fail to support) their communication with other international, home students, teachers, and local nationals. Secondly, by drawing on Jackson’s (2012) conceptualisation of culture as learned and fluid, issues associated with intercultural communication which goes beyond the university campus will be explored. By focusing on students’ exposure to the host sociocultural environment, I

investigate their (i.e., international students) development of cultural knowledge and linguistic competence through real-life observation and interaction with the local community.

#### 2.2.4 Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence and its limitations

Table 2.1 Model for the Intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997)

<p><b>Savoir être</b> <b>Intercultural attitudes</b> Curiosity, openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief of one's own.</p>		<p><b>Savoirs</b> <b>Knowledge</b> Knowledge of social groups and their products and processes in one's own and one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction.</p>
	<p><b>Savoir s' engager</b> <b>Critical cultural awareness</b> The ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries.</p>	
<p><b>Savoir comprendre</b> <b>Skills of interpreting and relating</b> The ability to interpret a document or even from another culture, to explain it and related it to documents or events from one's own.</p>		<p><b>Savoir apprendre/faire</b> <b>Skills of discovery and interactions.</b> Ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.</p>

The pre-eminent features of Byram's model lie in the fact that it makes a distinction between the *linguistic* and *cultural* characteristics of interculturally competent foreign language learners. The linguistic abilities that are associated with mutual understanding and effective negotiation in intercultural encounters are:

*Linguistic competence*: the ability to apply knowledge of the rules of a standard version of the language to produce and interpret spoken and written language.

*Sociolinguistic competence*: the ability to give to the language produced by an interlocutor—whether native speaker or not—meanings that are taken for granted by the interlocutor or are negotiated and made explicit with the interlocutor.

*Discourse competence*: the ability to use, discover and negotiate strategies for the production and interpretation of monologue or dialogue texts which follow the conventions of the culture of an interlocutor or are negotiated as intercultural texts for particular purposes (Byram, 1997, p. 48)

To elaborate the traits and skills pertaining to successful intercultural communication, Byram further details five *savoirs* that foreground two attitudinal and cognitive factors as premises of intercultural competence. As complementary skills to the prior linguistic dimension, he further develops three *savoirs* that embody culture-specific skills that necessitate intercultural understanding and communication. Table 2.1 elaborates the key components that constituting Byram's model of Intercultural Communicative Competence.

The five *savoirs* are assumed to present a scheme for learning language and culture simultaneously as part of the same process. It is also assumed that under this framework learners encounter language learning as much as a cultural experience as a linguistic one, with a balance between cultural knowledge and the skills that allow successful intercultural communication through understanding, relating, and utilising that knowledge. This model can also serve as a set of criteria by which to measure language learners' progress and position in relation to their development of intercultural communicative competence. At the core of Byram's ICC framework sits the final savoir, *savoir s'engager* or 'critical cultural awareness'. It refers to "the ability to decentre from one's own culture and its practices and products in order to gain insight into another" (Byram, 2006, p. 117). To be more specific, through critical cultural awareness, learners go beyond simply accumulating and recognising facts about other cultures; they start to critically compare the norms, values, beliefs, and behaviours of people from other cultural backgrounds with those of their own culture. It is also believed that such a comparison will lead to a relativistic shift in the learner's perspective, and enable him/her to embrace diverse values and perspectives through an expansion of interpretative frameworks beyond monological, ethnocentric points of view. Such an ethnorelative stance is also assumed to be the basis on which learners evaluate their intercultural encounters from a more rational and objective viewpoint, and which, in turn, enables them to be better able to mediate between different modes of intercultural interaction.

Abiding by Byram's conceptualisation of critical cultural awareness, Guilherme (2002) argues that foreign language/cultural education prepares learners to become global citizens in an intercultural world. She further proposes an interdisciplinary approach which encompasses a

critical pedagogy, cultural learning, and intercultural communication that may lead to the cultivation of critical cultural awareness. Hence, her definition in relation to ‘critical cultural awareness’ inclines towards the individual’s cognitive and emotional endeavours to pursue emancipation and social justice and commitment, while adopting a proactive, curious, and reflective manner in respect of culture-related values, beliefs, customs. It also encompasses being inclusive of and also alert to contradictions and disagreements, as well as consonance and similarities. Guilherme’s (2002) conceptualisation of critical cultural awareness is important to my research for two reasons: first, because of the central emphasis it places on foreign language education and intercultural communication, and secondly, because, in her stance, these should be strategically integrated into teaching and learning practices.

Although Byram’s (1997) model is perceived to be more comprehensive in terms of extending communicative competence to include more detailed needs and objectives of interaction across cultures, criticism to the model seems inevitably to point to its lack of specified or directive guidance regarding not only how learners should develop intercultural competence, but also the ways to do so. Houghton (2012) criticised Byram’s model for its failure to provide foreign language teachers with an explicit understanding of how to guide their teaching practices in order to enhance students’ intercultural competence. She prioritised the status of value judgment in critical cultural awareness by arguing that explicit interventions and instruction need to be oriented towards training language learners to adopt a nonjudgmental stance towards cultural differences not only by taking into account other’s perspectives and eliminating stereotypes and prejudices, but also by developing their ability to bring to different cultural experiences a rational and explicit standpoint from which to evaluate the encounter. The preeminent feature of her model of intercultural dialogue is the final stage of development, which she defines as *savoir se transformer*—knowing how to become and how to develop oneself selectively through interaction with others. That process, she argues, involves an individual’s rational decision on whether or not to change in accordance with the interlocutors. I agree with Houghton to the extent that critical cultural awareness entails not only cultivating an intellectual empathy by minimising bias and stereotypical generalisation, but also critical reflection on those cultural differences and similarities that underpin people’s value judgment. In terms of reinforcing students’ experience of intercultural communication, interventions that are directed towards reducing biased judgments towards host cultural norms and also activities that encourage students’ self-reflection on their intercultural and international experiences, such as reflective reports, diary and essay writing, are more likely to trigger successful intercultural communication and competence. Critiques of Byram’s model have also accentuated its dichotomy of language and culture. Risager’s (2007) concept of linguaculture, contradicts Byram’s stance. The concept of linguaculture purports that linguistic practice is culture in itself.

Risager (2007) points out that Byram presupposes a “national” conception of language (2007, p. 124), which is associated with only one particular group of people. Thus, the concept of culture used in Byram’s model appears to be nationalist and essentialist (e.g., Belz, 2007). An essentialist view of ‘culture’ was defined by Holliday (1999) as a concrete social phenomenon that represents the essential character of a particular nation. So basically speaking, essentialists see national culture as physical entities, which can be seen, touched and experienced by others; as opposed to a non-essentialist view of culture which allows social behaviour to speak for itself. By contrast, Risager (2007) addresses the relationship between second/foreign language and the cultural context in which it operates and functions in the L2 culture pedagogy, thereby liberating culture as a recourse for investigating and understanding social behaviour, without imposing preconceptions about national cultural characteristic. From a poststructuralist point of view, Byram’s model also limits itself in linking those five *savoirs* in an inseparable manner and by delineating the inherent interdependence between the factors that create those stable competences/*savoirs*. Other criticisms of Byram’s model, however, focus mainly on its European context and origin, and its tendency to focus on classroom interaction between foreign language learners and native speakers of the host language, which limits its generalisability to other cultural contexts.

The above overview of approaches, related studies, and the critiques to Byram’s model indicate that studying intercultural communication is a complex matter which requires tools of understanding and interpretation that permit complex description and analysis. In responding to these challenges, and taking into account the fact that the main focus of my study is on understanding the effectiveness of the internationalisation policy of University X in promoting students’ intercultural communication, the following section presents an overview of research on foreign language education and intercultural communication.

### 2.3 Research on foreign language education and intercultural communication

Before concentrating on the analysis of the separate issues that the present study seeks to explore, it is necessary to first contextualise the whole study by reviewing issues related to foreign language education in China; and then present an overview of theories and empirical studies on both home and international students’ language learning and intercultural communication experience in the Chinese higher education context, since it is students’ perceptions and experience of intercultural-related interventions in accordance with the institution’s internationalisation policy that constitute the main story of this study.

### 2.3.1 Foreign language education in China

In today's foreign language teaching scenario, the communicative approach has the widest appeal for most teaching practitioners worldwide. Theoretical disciplines that have been developed and popularised among foreign language acquisition and language pedagogy researchers in the Western world are also frequently applied in Chinese teaching classrooms through trial and error. The status of English language education as part of China's educational policy for curriculum internationalisation and modernisation has undoubtedly contributed greatly to enhancing the international acceptance and competitiveness of China. As a result, frameworks and models established for teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) have largely informed the theoretical development and international Chinese education research studies (Lam, 2005). Amongst the vast array of theories and knowledge relating to foreign language instruction and acquisition that Chinese practitioners could refer to, Chomsky's (2006) language competence concept, the communicative language teaching methodology, and the notion of incorporating culture knowledge into the language education process stand out as useful and conducive to international Chinese language education (Xing, 2006; Everson & Xiao, 2009). However, the establishment of international Chinese language education as a university discipline both within China and abroad has been critically argued to be at a developing level and as underachieving, due to the lack of theoretical bases on which course design, teaching methodology, and assessment profiles can develop (Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2012).

The lack of well-compiled and officially acknowledged teaching materials and methods to guide Chinese language teachers means that Western learners have to adopt the quite traditional and rigid ways of memorising and translating when learning the Chinese language. Since the opening-up policy was launched in the 1970s, linguistic and pedagogic experts worldwide have devoted much of their time to researching the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language. Some have concentrated on proficiency and fluency in the spoken language (Richards, 1996); others have made great contributions to formulating a curriculum that is particularly appropriate to Chinese language classes (Ross, 1997; Gallagher, 1999; Chen, 2003). Some researchers have focused on the process of teaching various skills. Discussions about listening and speaking skills are based on whether to apply tone-based or comprehension-based strategies (Chen, 1997; Feng, 2004; Yeh, 1997), while, research into reading and writing skills concentrates mainly on learning the Chinese characters (Yang, 2000; Yin, 2002; Feng, 2003). In addition, topics such as the usefulness of high-tech media such as computers also attract a great number of researchers



(Zhang, 1998; Xie, 1999; Bai, 2003; Chan, 2003). Finally, the claim that cultural knowledge and psychological factors should be incorporated into language education programmes has encouraged educators and researchers to research more encompassing and comprehensive teaching approaches (Wen, 1999; Li, 1999; Hong, 2002).

Research that concentrates on the code choice of Chinese language teachers has found quite a number of contradictions as regards teachers' beliefs about the medium of instruction in their multilingual and multicultural classrooms (Wang, 2013). Some teachers tend to insist on what the language policy and teaching syllabus indicate, that is, they follow an exclusive use of the target language pedagogy, while forbidding the use of English as a way of explaining. Although some have agreed on the pedagogical value of referring to English, they still feel it is illegitimate to adopt an English instruction approach. In contrast, some see the English language as the only available tool for transmitting Chinese culture in a pluricultural classroom, as its use facilitates the establishment of close relationships between teachers and international students, and also helps those students who have difficulty in adapting to the multilingual and multicultural environment. Findings show that it is valuable for CFL teachers to possess good English proficiency as it helps them to manage interactivity and to maintain a harmonious relationship with students who have little or no prior knowledge of the Chinese language (Wang, 2010). Using English can also "benefit the class in providing comparative language knowledge" (Wang, 2013, p. 13) thereby enhancing students' understanding of Chinese culture and language. The actual teaching practices of CFL teachers are found to be influenced by multiple factors, such as their English learning experience, English proficiency, and national identity (Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2012). CFL teachers need to have institutional guidelines and support if they are to develop of a systematic pedagogy of Chinese language teaching practices which are designed to cater for the needs of multilingual students. In order to achieve an effective learning experience, the application of English appears to be necessary for both linguistic and cultural analysis and comparison between Chinese and English, and to improve students' intercultural awareness and knowledge in terms of international communication.

Given the important and indispensable role that Chinese language education plays in driving forward the internationalisation process in China, and especially in view of its function of diversifying intercultural contact at home and disseminating Chinese culture worldwide, this study has chosen to target overseas students enrolled in University X's language programme at the Department of Chinese as a Second Language, in order, not only to make sense of their intercultural communication experience inside and outside of the classroom, but also to explore the extent to which such a programme promotes the implementation of the internationalisation policy of the specific institution.

### 2.3.2 Concepts and theories of foreign language education and intercultural communication

The foreign language education context has been acknowledged as an integral part of students' development of intercultural communicative competence. More specifically, the notion of 'context' in language education refers primarily to both the academic setting and the sociocultural environment. This concept also resonates with Fantini's (2012) definition of second language development in which she refers to two distinct processes of language acquisition, that is, "learning" language in classroom setting and "acquiring" language in a naturalistic environment. The underlying assumption of such dichotomous development, according to Fantini, lies in the different results that the two processes could generate. This theory inspired me to focus in this study on the extent to which both academic and sociocultural support promote students' development of language proficiency and intercultural competence.

It is not uncommon for people who are fluent speakers of another language to have little knowledge about the culture that that language represents (Fantini, 2012). However, it could be argued that mastery of the target language should, in fact, facilitate one's entry into the host culture. Although some interculturalists hold separatist views on the relation between language proficiency and intercultural communication, leaving the language dimension to the linguistic educators within relevant courses involved in intercultural training programmes or models, intercultural scholars, when conceptualising and constructing models of intercultural competence, still prioritise linguistic competence amongst the various attributes and skills that an interculturally competent person should acquire (Spencer-Oatey, 2010; Byram, 2012; Fantini, 2012). The importance of host language proficiency is also highlighted in the assertions made in Fantini's (2006) international research project on intercultural competence. In her conclusion, Fantini claimed that "increased host language proficiency enhances entry possibilities, whereas lack of proficiency constrains entry, adaptation, and understanding of the host culture" (Fantini, 2012, p. 273). Accordingly, how host language proficiency affects international students' entry into the host culture, and more importantly how it affects the intercultural communication with home students, forms an important part of this study's investigation.

Findings from previous research showed that being engaged in a novel academic and sociocultural environment and speaking another language provide profound opportunities for students to reconstruct their self-identity in relation to the Other through the process of both self-awareness and cultural awareness. The significant impact of speaking and learning another language on the reconstruction of one's identity has been substantially addressed by previous

researchers (Evans, 1988; Libber & Lindner, 1993; Alfred, 2003), who argued that learning a different language enables individuals to “switch, as if into an alternative mind with cultural understandings that may be at odds with their first culture” (Gill, 2007).

Moreover, some have argued that learners’ engagement with the new academic and sociocultural environment is the underlying force that drives the process of intercultural learning (Gill, 2007; Alfred et al., 2003), a term defined by Gill (2007) as incorporating both interactional experiences of two or more different cultures and the learning that takes place during such a process. Factors that contribute to students’ intercultural learning include the context; there, the academic staff and networks of relationships are particularly highlighted as significant for the development of intercultural learning. Teachers’ supportive feedback on students’ academic work, empathetic attitudes towards misunderstandings, guidance and instruction on task-taking and assignments are all highly valued. Gill (2007) also found that the home network provides overseas students with a source of emotional and moral support, understanding and reassurance. Out-group relations built upon students’ own cultural groups are also still considered as conducive to developing attitudes, knowledge, and skills for intercultural communication. Therefore, issues concerning how and to what extent the process of speaking and learning another language changes students’ perceptions of their own, as opposed to their perception of the host culture, seems to be a valuable avenue of inquiry for evaluating the results of foreign language education.

### 2.3.3 Empirical studies on students’ language learning and intercultural communication in China

For a long time, research into foreign students’ education in China has placed its emphasis on the linguistic dimension, taking it as an instrument through which teaching and learning could operate. However, it is claimed that the study of students’ acquisition of Chinese cultural knowledge and their intercultural communicative experience is underdeveloped. Although some leading universities have already added Chinese culture courses to their curriculum relating to language learning programmes, most of these courses are mere introductions to Chinese ancient history, culture, and customs, and do not reach what Chen (2008) called the “liberal level”. The “liberal level” is important. For overseas students in China, liberal education, according to Chen, refers mainly to the process of embedding profound Chinese cultural knowledge into all levels of education. Doing so releases overseas students from utilitarianism and enables them to reach a broader level of understanding that encompasses intercultural understanding and cultural awareness, and in the process, makes international students responsible for disseminating

Chinese culture to the world, something which requires a higher degree of communicative competence.

Zhou and Griffiths (2011), in their exploratory study of Chinese students' failure in intercultural communication, also uncovered the fact that instruction in the foreign language alone could not cultivate students' communication skills and intercultural awareness if the cultural knowledge they needed is not embedded in their language teaching programmes. Although some scholars (Fantini, 2012; Byram & Hu, 2013) point out that cultural knowledge is not an absolute prerequisite for language learning, it can be argued that an understanding of the former does facilitate and accelerate the progress of the latter. That idea seems to accord with language and cultural relational theories in the research literature worldwide. Recent research evidence also suggests that a lack of intercultural awareness and teachers' inadequate covering of intercultural knowledge in class are the main factors that affect students' intercultural communicative competence (Hao & Zhang 2009; Marek, 2008). Many studies that have explored the factors that contribute towards the development of intercultural sensitivity and communicative competence have highlighted the significance of the cognitive skill of respecting cultural differences. Hence, respect is assumed to be the driving force that encourages people to engage in intercultural interaction (McLean & Ransom, 2005; Sebnem, Dicle, & Guldem, 2009). Marek (2009) further recommended that students' attitudinal respect for culturally different others and their norms could be motivated and subsequently improved through the incorporation of cultural knowledge into language teaching programmes.

Given the advocacy for liberal education among overseas students in China, it is crucial that the present study locates its focus on the 'cultural knowledge' and 'communicative competence' that can be acquired through academic courses. However, as I was unable to identify any research within the literature that specifically focused on intercultural communication experiences between Chinese and intercultural students in the Chinese university context, the present study aims to fill this gap in the extant empirical research.

## 2.4 Formulation of research questions

The aim of the above literature review was to provide a theoretical basis for the following research aims:

1. To present to China's higher education organisations an understanding of how the policy of one particular university endeavours to develop intercultural understanding and communication in its students (both international and home).

2. To identify how that institution's institutional support and activities facilitate (or fail to facilitate) students' development of intercultural competence.
3. To understand both Chinese and intercultural students' intercultural communication experience inside and outside the campus.

Inspired by the existing literature and bearing its limitations in mind, I formulated the following research questions.

1. To what extent do the internationalisation policies of University X address the issue of promoting all students' intercultural learning and communication?
2. How do students experience the institutional system that is associated with the internationalisation policy of University X?
3. How do students at University X perceive and make sense of their intercultural communication experiences?

Specifically, the formulation of the first research question is based on my exploration of approaches to the internationalisation of higher education and to foreign language education in Chinese universities. Overall, this study aims to understand how students experience the institutional system that is associated with University X's internationalisation policy, and how that institutional system promotes students' development of intercultural communicative competence. The study aims, therefore, to expose the institution's current strengths and weaknesses, and thus to develop recommendations for how these might be improved or eliminated. My review of the approaches to internationalisation suggests that there may be relevant features in University X's internationalisation policy initiatives that impact on its institutional system (i.e., its teaching pedagogy, administration, extracurricular activities, etc.), and accordingly, the intercultural communication among its diverse student population. It is with these aspects in mind that the first research question has been formulated.

The second research question was formulated in response to this study's focus of inquiry regarding the effectiveness of the institutional system in promoting students' linguistic competence and intercultural communication. As discussed in 2.2.1, the majority of previous studies on foreign language education in China have focused mainly on the effects of the teacher's medium of instruction, while ignoring their role in delivering intercultural knowledge and guiding students' communication outside the classroom. My review of the existing concepts and theories of foreign language education and intercultural communication has highlighted the significance of the 'context' of language education, i.e., academic programmes and the

sociocultural environment, in shaping students' intercultural communicative competence. As a result, exploring the effects that not only language teaching and learning, but also sociocultural factors have on students' intercultural communication experiences can provide insight into how their intercultural competence evolves as they engage within specific academic and sociocultural contexts.

The earlier discussion of empirical studies on students' language learning and intercultural communication in China revealed that there is a lack of insight into how understanding the intercultural communication experience may influence or inform the intricacies of an individual's development of intercultural competence, i.e., his/her attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Examining the way in which both international and home students make sense of their intercultural communication experience inside and outside the classroom, therefore, reveals not only their deepest concerns when encountering cultural others, but also the communicative strategies they are most likely to employ. Therefore, it is through identifying personal, social, and pedagogical factors that are conducive to the development of both international and home students' intercultural competence that this study draws implications that will be of use to administrators, policy makers, and academic staff, and which will help them to improve the process of internationalisation. It is with these aspects in mind that the third research question has been formulated.

Overall, this study investigates the internationalisation policy of University X, its target university. Thus, the study is informed by the approaches to internationalisation of higher education, with specific concern for those designed to develop students' intercultural learning and communicative competence. The students' experience and perception of the institutional system are then identified and compared with relevant elements in University X's internationalisation policy, in order to see how institutional support and activities (that are associated with the internationalisation policy) promote (or fail to promote) students' intercultural learning and communication, and thus to answer the second research question. In addition, this comparison is used to identify gaps in and problems with University X's internationalisation policy. This comparison then acts as a basis for making suggestions for improving the curriculum. Finally, this study also involves an intensive exploration of both home and international students' perception and interpretation of their intercultural communication experience on campus and with the local community. In doing so, the third research question is addressed.

## 2.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided the theoretical background for the present research. The study aims to understand how the internationalisation policy of one Chinese university—termed University X—promotes all students’ intercultural learning and communication. In order to address this research aim, I reviewed the existing literature from the following aspects.

The review of approaches to the internationalisation of higher education uncovered three areas that are of particular relevance to this study. Their relevance lies in their linkage to intercultural competence. They are: curriculum internationalisation; internationalisation at home, and intercultural dialogue. Specifically, curriculum internationalisation addresses interventions and supports in the host institution beyond the language teaching classroom. This literature can be used to identify 1) the role of faculty staff and administrators in building relationships and managing the academic progress of international students; and, 2) institutional support and interventions to enhance intercultural learning and contact outside the classroom. The literature on internationalisation at home is concerned primarily with nonmobile domestic students. It can be used to capture: 1) features of the international classroom; and, 2) campus-based, intentional approaches to enhance intercultural contact between home and international students. Finally, literature on intercultural dialogue focuses on institutional strategies and support that seek to enhance international students’ connection with the local community.

This chapter next examined existing models and frameworks of intercultural competence. I reviewed three influential theoretical models or frameworks that are widely used in intercultural communication research. Specifically, despite its advantages in identifying individuals’ evolutionary and systematic progress towards intercultural competence during their period of residence abroad, Bennett’s (1986) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity is criticised as being “correspondingly weak in specifying the interpersonal and intercultural competence traits that facilitate or moderate the course of such evolution” (Spitzberg & Changnon 2009, p. 24). Deardorff’s model of intercultural competence, which focuses more on the individual, was also considered. However, because it pays limited attention to ‘relationality’, that is, how people manage intercultural interactions, a notion that is foregrounded by intercultural studies on East-Asian countries, such as Japan, China and Korea, where communication is embedded within world-views that value harmony and relationality, it too was rejected. Byram’s model of intercultural communication competence, on the other hand, incorporates critical cultural awareness into foreign language education and intercultural communication, and gives equal credit to both academic and sociocultural environments in facilitating students’ development of intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills. I, therefore, draw on this model as a starting point

for the analysis and interpretation of this study regarding the participants' perception and responses to the institutional system, as well as their understanding of intercultural communication both inside and outside the university campus.

In regard to foreign language education in China, and teaching Chinese as a foreign language in particular, there is a lack of well-established curriculum as a theoretical basis on which teaching methodology and assessment approaches can develop. Moreover, current studies and theories on Chinese language teachers' actual teaching practices have focused exclusively on the medium of instruction (i.e., either English or Chinese) and how the teachers' language choice affected their relationship with international students, as well as students' understanding of Chinese culture. Thus, these studies can provide only a partial picture of the significance of the Chinese language classroom environment in developing intercultural communicative competence. Moreover, the existing literature does not provide a detailed picture of how Chinese language pedagogy helps or hinders students' development of intercultural communicative competence, especially interaction and interpersonal relationships outside the classroom.

As to current concepts and theories on foreign language education and intercultural communication, the focus is mainly on language acquisition in different contexts, adaptation to host culture, intercultural learning, and reconstruction of self-identity. These concepts and theories provide some insight into the relationship between language learning and the development of intercultural competence. As they focus on making general claims and predictions, however, they may be inadequate or even misleading in capturing the complexity and dynamics of individuals' lived intercultural communication experiences, given that these are difficult to predict and can be influenced by many conditional factors.

Finally, I reviewed some empirical research on international students' language learning in China and on Chinese university students' intercultural communication experience, and discovered that there is a lack of empirical research which investigates the intercultural communication between both international and Chinese students. In particular, I was unable to identify any research that specifically investigates both international and Chinese students' experience of institutional support and activities which are designed to promote their intercultural communicative competence in Chinese universities.



## Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

### 3.1 Introduction

As stated in the previous chapter, I intend to investigate the following three research questions in this study:

- 1. To what extent do the internationalisation policies of one Chinese university address the issue of promoting all students' intercultural understanding and communication?*
- 2. How do students experience the institutional system that is associated with the internationalisation policy of this university?*
- 3. How do students perceive and make sense of their intercultural communication experiences?*

In order to address these questions, I first justify my decision to adopt social constructionism as the study's theoretical framework (section 3.2) and a case study approach as the methodological choice of this study (section 3.3). I then present and discuss the data collection procedures (section 3.4) and the process and methods used to analyse the data (section 3.5). The chapter next considers some important methodological concerns, including researcher reflexivity (section 3.6), before finally addressing and discussing ethical issues (section 3.7) and research trustworthiness (section 3.8).

### 3.2 Rationale for adopting a social constructionist paradigm

This study adopts social constructionism as the theoretical framework through which it examines and makes sense of the phenomena under investigation, on the assumption that such a foundation will inform the methodology and methods used for the exploration of knowledge (Mason, 2002). My philosophical stance as a realist is backed up my own belief that different individuals harbour distinctive interpretations of their experience, and that exploring these experiences can enable the researcher to gain a comprehensive interpretation of the participants' experience and their understanding of phenomena by drawing on their preconceptions of the world.

I believe that searching for knowledge relies to a large extent on an exploration of human experience as it is lived (Becker, 1992). Therefore, to make sense of and develop an understanding of students' intercultural experience, I give priority to participants' lived experience and perspectives while engaging with people from other backgrounds as the source and foundation of knowledge. Here, knowledge refers mainly to participants' understanding of

their intercultural encounters, along with my interpretation of their accounts. The belief that knowledge is created through an exploration the meanings participants attribute to their lived experience of intercultural encounters, therefore, locates this study within the social constructionism paradigm.

As discussed in chapter 1, this study focuses on understanding students' intercultural communication experiences and how such experiences, and the participants' development of intercultural communicative competence were either supported or hindered by the institutional system in a Chinese university context. I believe that students develop their intercultural communicative competence during the learning and social-cultural communication process of interacting with people from diverse cultural backgrounds and social status (including Chinese academic staff, host university administrators, and people in the local community). Furthermore, as is often the case, students may not engage themselves autonomously in intercultural communication with cultural others; rather, their opportunities to engage in intercultural encounters are substantially influenced by external factors such as institutional support and activities, as evidenced by previous studies (Leask, 2010).

For this reason, drawing on a research paradigm that focuses on processes and social and interactional practices offers the most appropriate paradigm through which the present study can address students' interactive characteristics on the one hand, and the effectiveness of institutional policy and practices on the other. Bearing this idea mind, and given the fact that the major concern of this study is to look for explanations for social phenomena within individuals (Burr, 2003), I, therefore, draw on the theory of social constructionism as the theoretical framework that guides this whole study.

### 3.3 Rationale for a case study approach

Based on the exploratory nature of the research questions, the philosophical assumption underpinning this research is generally interpretative. The study is framed within the qualitative paradigm which, according to Marshall and Rossman (1999), focuses on employing exploratory approaches in order to achieve a better understanding of human action and perspectives in natural settings. In addition, as one of the objectives of the research is to examine the effectiveness of actual practices based on existing internationalisation policies implemented in real-world settings, a case study approach appears to be the most suitable research tool, as it allows for in-depth exploration of a particular case in its natural setting (Yin, 2003).

The target institution of this study is one of the key institutions authorised by Projects 211 and 985. Here termed University X, it enjoys a worldwide reputation for the quality of its pedagogy

and research. Given University X's commitment to cultivating highly talented graduates with comprehensive capacities, the university has carried out continuous pedagogic and managerial reforms to create highly competent graduates and to attract outstanding teaching scholars and students from around the world in an effort to build up the quality of its human resources and to foster Chinese-foreign intercultural understanding. Although other top universities such as Wuhan and Fudan are also renowned for their provision of comprehensive programmes and easy access for international students, I selected University X for the following reasons. It holds the advantageous position of taking the lead amongst China's renowned universities in initiating and implementing the higher education internationalisation process; it is located in a large city in China; and, it enjoys an all-encompassing cultural heritage that enables home and international students to be in touch with standard Chinese language and culture. Given the limited ability of this case study research to investigate the experience and perceptions of all international and home students with regard to University X's institutional support and activities, and also their intercultural communication experience, the key participants involved in this study come from the Department of Chinese as a Second Language. That department was chosen because it could reflect a diverse mix of Chinese and international students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The scope of this case study is, therefore, somewhat limited in that it represents the experiences, perspectives, and reflections of only one specific group of students.

### **3.4 Data collection instruments and procedure**

In order to answer the three research questions set out in chapter 2, a five-month-long case study, i.e., from February 2015 to June 2015, was carried out at University X. Documentation and semistructured interviews were employed as the major data collection instruments in the fieldwork process. Through these I was able to acquire in-depth understanding of the key issues under investigation. The following sections outline the data collection procedures, and the rationale for selecting these specific data collection and analysis approaches.

#### **3.4.1 Access to the field**

Access to the research setting was gained through personal contact with department deans and head teachers. These individuals took on the role of gatekeepers, as they were qualified to control access to the site and to students. They also facilitated my engagement with key informants, i.e., international and home students within the specific department. I initially gained access to potential participants through face-to-face contact with the Head of the

Department of Chinese as a Second Language and course leaders. These interviews enabled me to provide those gatekeepers with both verbal and written information relating to my research project, which, in turn, helped them to recommend potential participants, i.e., both international and home students who had taken part in the institution's intercultural programmes, e.g., its induction and language training courses. In choosing the participants for this study, priority was given to those who were willing and who had the time to take part in the study. Altogether 30 students were recruited for phase two—the individual interview phase. The participant sample contained an equal number of international and home students.

### 3.4.2 Pilot study

Prior to carrying out the document analysis and individual interviews, a pilot study was conducted. This took the form of semistructured interviews with two international students from the target department. These students were also involved in the main, follow-up study. The interview guide (see Appendix A) that was developed in accordance with the research questions and tailored to fit the specific institution was trailed to examine its applicability in terms of the aim of the study. Each of the two pilot interviews focused on the students' experience of communicating with other international and domestic students, as well as with people from the local community during their sojourn in China. Particular emphasis was placed on perspectives pertaining to the influence of such intercultural experience and also to the support they had received from the institution to improve their intercultural understanding and communication. Although the data emerged from the pilot study to some extent provide insight into the research questions, several issues were identified as implications to the main study.

First, to avoid data redundancy, some questions, which could result in similar answers, were merged into one question. For example, instead of interrogating the international participants' perspective on the way that their Chinese language teachers, the course content and the institutional activities promoted their understanding of Chinese culture respectively, I decided to merge them into one question: 'In what ways do you think the Chinese language programme helps you learn more about Chinese people/culture?'

Second, regarding the questions about participants' preconceptions of Chinese people and how these preconceptions are addressed through either Chinese language courses or institutional interventions, both participants' responses turned out to be irrelevant to the main focus of this study and did not contribute to the research questions. As a result, I removed such questions from my interview protocol.

Third, I refined and expanded the original questions included in Theme 3 (see Appendix A) after analyzing and reflecting on the data from the pilot study. Both participants tended to give much credit to their intercultural communication experiences outside the campus with the local community, such as travelling and home-stay experiences, which turned out to be part of the institution's policy to increase intercultural and international experience of its overseas students. As such, I decided to probe more about their perceptions of travelling and communicating with people in the local community, in addition to the more general main question of inquiring about their intercultural learning experience in some informal circumstances.

As such, the pilot study provided an opportunity to trial the proposed research method and, therefore, to fine-tune the focus of the semistructured individual interview in line with the key points to be investigated.

### 3.4.3 Sampling

In light of the fact that this study was a small-scale case study and bearing in mind the fact that its aim was to explore only identifiable issues and gather accounts from particular groups of individuals, purposive sampling was applied to the selection of information for document analysis and participants for the individual interviews. To satisfy the specific purposes of the research, the selected documents and participants were, therefore, chosen on the basis of "their typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 156). According to Teddlie and Yu (2007), purposive sampling can serve several purposes, such as comparison, generalisation, and theory generation. The most frequent reason for choosing case study is to get access to the most "knowledgeable people" (Ball, 1990), that is, people who are familiar with the relevant issues being studied because of "their professional role, power, access to networks, expertise or experience" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 157), and who are also eligible to comment on those issues or topics with which the researcher is mostly concerned.

Table 3.1 The detailed profile of international participants

Number	Pseudonym	Gender	Nationality	Previous experience of living in China
1	Christina	F	American	Yes
2	Kaho	F	Japanese	No
3	George	M	British	No
4	Steve	M	American	No

5	Struan	M	British	No
6	Matilyn	F	American	Yes
7	Ben	M	British	No
8	James	M	Spanish	No
9	Lauren	F	American	No
10	Matthew	M	American	No
11	Hannah	F	Dutch	No
12	Michelle	F	American	Yes
13	Patrick	M	South African	No
14	Olivia	F	British	No
15	Dasha	F	Russian	Yes

Table 3.2 The detailed profile of Chinese participants

Number	Pseudonym	Gender	Previous experience of studying abroad
1	Yu	F	No
2	Liu	M	No
3	Lu	F	No
4	Wu	F	Yes
5	Wen	F	No
6	Xia	F	No
7	Jiang	M	No
8	Zhang	M	No
9	Li	F	Yes
10	Du	F	No
11	Lin	F	Yes
12	Gan	F	Yes
13	Fan	M	No

14	Mo	F	Yes
15	Zhao	M	Yes

Epistemologically, my research is located on an intensive understanding of international and home students' intercultural communication experience. In this experience communication is mainly carried out through verbal exchange and so (a common) language plays a dominant role in their daily lives. My epistemology is also based on the assumption that having some degree of language proficiency and cultural knowledge pertaining to the host country would facilitate mutual exchange and understanding between people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and, furthermore, that such linguistic proficiency and cultural knowledge also both influence and help to enhance the opportunities for intercultural communication with people from the host community and also with those from other countries. For these reasons, students from University X's Department of Chinese as a Second Language were targeted as the potential sample group from which I could recruit students for individual interview. University X's recruitment records showed the diversity of the nationalities of the international student body enrolled in its various departments. In total, University X had approximately 3574 foreign students from 116 different countries. People from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds differ enormously in terms of their perceptions of teaching methods, school management, relationships established through social networks, etc. and also in their experiences regarding an institution's interventions designed to reinforce their intercultural contacts. I, therefore, recruited 15 Chinese master's students and 15 international students from University X's Department of Chinese as a Second Language to take part in this study. The international participants were students either on an exchange programme or enrolled in short language courses (i.e., non-credit-bearing courses) in the Department of Chinese as a Second Language. Table 3.1 shows a detailed profile of all the international participants, including their gender, nationality, and previous experience of living in China.

#### 3.4.4 Documents

According to Fitzgerald (2007), documents from education institutions can provide meaningful information relating to their context and culture, and subsequently narrow the exploratory lens of the researcher to specific aspects of his/her areas of study. My study entailed an initial analysis of official documents such as the university's prospectus and annual plan. This analysis aimed to identify key points or strategies which were designed to promote and reinforce

students' intercultural experience. This evaluation of the official documents also laid the foundation for the follow-up individual interviews, and enabled me to examine not only "whether what the school publicly says about how it operates is embedded in the culture of teachers and students" (Fitzgerald, 2007, p. 278), but also the extent to which the practices embedded in the policies facilitate the development of students' intercultural communication experiences. In this sense, the findings from the document analysis addressed my initial research question: *To what extent do the internationalisation policies of one Chinese university address the issue of developing students' intercultural communication?*

In an effort to gain a comprehensive understanding of University X's internationalisation policy regarding strategies and interventions that purport to improve students' intercultural experience, and also to contextualise students' lived experience and perspectives within the specific culture of this particular Chinese university, I analysed the institution's internationalisation policy prior to conducting the individual interviews. This analysis not only pinpointed some areas for further inquiry regarding the students' perspectives on the university's specific institutional support or activities, but also enabled me to examine the extent to which students' intercultural experiences were in line with the university's internationalisation goals.

As the fieldwork unfolded, I realised that evaluating the university's internationalisation policy and approach in line with the theories and models of internationalisation in the literature pertaining to the development of students' intercultural experience shed a new light on my research in terms of identifying University X's specific strengths and weaknesses in promoting students' intercultural communication. This insight shaped the way that the semistructured interview data were later analysed; that is, I was able to frame participants' reflections on the institution's support strategies and interventions against a systematic strategic plan within the universal higher education context. As an outsider to the research setting, either getting access to the printed material or directly interviewing university faculty was unrealistic. Therefore, only Internet document sources could be used as raw data for further analysis. The main purpose of reviewing the policy documents was to identify missions, supportive strategies, and events explicitly described and stated in the university's public website as pertaining to promoting intercultural engagement among its diverse student bodies.

### 3.4.5 In-depth semistructured interview

Considering the different styles of interview approach that are available, semistructured interviewing was deemed appropriate because, while this style of interview uses a consistent set



of basic questions, it also allows the interviewer to adapt these questions or probe for further information. To be more specific, semistructured interviews offer more scope for expanded responses than do either the more rigid structured approach or the spontaneously generated questions of an unstructured approach which may not fully capture key ideas from a range of perspectives (Oppenheim, 1992). A semistructured interview is more like a conversation, and, therefore, it has the capacity to unveil hidden insights for further discussion. The flexibility of this interview structure also provides the interviewer with more space in which to probe unexpected topics or issues raised by participants, while still being guided by an overall goal and aim in relation to the research (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Furthermore, Seidman (2012) asserts that an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience lies at the root of the in-depth interview. He further argues that, although such approaches as observation enable researchers to get access to human behaviour, “interviewing allows us to put behaviour in context and provides access to understanding their action” (p. 9). Therefore, in-depth interviewing allowed me, as the researcher, to make sense of people’s experience from their own perspective, and also to understand how their experience interconnects with forces of the social communities within which they live and interact. In this way, in-depth interviews facilitate the discovery of relationships among people living in a shared community.

The following section presents a systematic description of what was done when conducting the study’s interviews. The rationale for the interview procedure rests on Seidman’s (2012) three-interview series. Abiding by the research questions developed prior to the main study, each interview asked a sequence of main questions, with each being supported by probes.

### **Stage 1**

In a systematic manner, Seidman (2012) initially addresses the important role that individuals’ past experience pertaining to the phenomenon under investigation has played in affecting the way they experience and make sense of the current situation. In order to gather the participants’ background information and warm up the interview atmosphere, a bio-data sheet (see Appendix B) was, therefore, prepared prior to each interview with the purpose of getting an initial impression of both the personal and educational backgrounds of the international participants. Accordingly, information that related to each student’s nationality, years of learning and living in China, and previous experience of sojourning in another country constituted the key points of their bio-data sheet. To move the interview forward, the questions asked at the first stage focused on eliciting both Chinese and international participants’ descriptive accounts of their expectations and preconceptions towards (communicating with) Chinese people and also people

from other cultural backgrounds. These questions enabled me to get a general picture of the participants' backgrounds, that is, how participants' past experience, especially the sociohistorical context from which they come, had influenced their behaviours, attitudes, and perspectives pertaining to their intercultural communication experience, and, therefore, contributed to answering the research question about how students make sense of their intercultural experience.

## **Stage 2**

Eliciting concrete details of the students' lived experience of intercultural communication on campus and with the local community constituted the focal point of inquiry for the second stage of the interview. This part started with broad, introductory questions that aligned with the sequence of themes fine-tuned in the pilot study. Each of the questions was followed by probes to elicit meanings underlying the participants' responses, such as "What do you mean by saying...?" "Can you explain more about this issue?" Instead of directly asking about a participant's experience of encountering and communicating with cultural others, I chose to embark on the inquiry by using such questions as: "Have your expectations been met or not through either your Chinese language course or communicating with people from other cultural backgrounds?" and "In what ways have your preconceptions been challenged or reinforced?" These were followed by probing questions based on the participants' responses. For instance, most interviewees tended to talk in generalities, so were asked to provide more details: "Can you give me an example of that?" "What happened in the Chinese language course?" "How did communication with Chinese people change your expectations?" I also expected that the process of reflecting on their intercultural encounter in conjunction with sense-making about the influence of their past experience on their current behaviours and relations with others would provide comprehensive data that would relate to and so help to answer the research question pertaining to students' perspectives and reflections on their intercultural experience, and also the way they make sense of it.

Another major part of the reflective inquiry was based on the research question relating to how students experience institutional interventions and support (that are associated with its internationalisation policy). Information gathering on this area constituted the final part of the interview procedure. Here students were stimulated to reflect on the extent to which institutional support and activities had promoted their intercultural understanding and communication. Guided by findings from policy document analysis, this stage of inquiry focused on the following areas: 1) perception of teachers and teaching methods; 2) intercultural communication experience inside the classroom; 3) intercultural communication experience with the institutional system outside the classroom and with the wider community; and, 4) participants'

interaction with the university's administration system.

### **Stage 3**

Finally, each interview ended up with some open-ended questions, such as “Is there anything else you'd like to add?”, and in the case of further clarification and member-checking, participants were also asked if they would like to be contacted later after the interview.

Generally speaking, the interviews lasted for between 60 and 90 minutes. Each interviewed was audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. In order to ensure that the interviews were conducted in environments with which the participants were familiar and in which they felt relaxed, the interviewees chose where they wanted to be interviewed either on or off campus. Given my own role as a student researcher, I was mindful of the fact that the power dynamics between me and the participants might have a negative impact on the articulation of their actual feelings and thoughts as a result of emotional pressure and psychological anxiety. In such circumstances, Kvale (1996) highlights the importance of ‘transparency’ in terms of the quality of the interview. To achieve transparency, it was necessary for me to reveal my own position as not only a researcher, but also as an international student sojourning in another country. Here, it was also assumed that this shared experience would facilitate the establishment of a rapport between the international participants and me. In addition, choosing an appropriate time and place for interviewees to reflect and ask questions also served as a strategy conducive to equalising the relationship between me, as the researcher, and the interview participants (Kvale, 1996).

#### **3.4.6 The interview language**

As the participants came from a diverse group of nationalities, both English and Mandarin Chinese were adopted as the interview languages.

The rationale for choosing Chinese students' mother tongue as the medium of communication can be attributed to the assumption made by some linguists that “social reality as experienced is unique to one's own language” (Chapman, 2006, as cited in van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, & Deeg, 2010). People who speak other languages tend to have different perceptions of the world around them. Since it is imperative for the researcher to derive subjective meaning from the participants' lived experience, language serves to transmit meaning and, at the same time, influences how meaning is constructed. Therefore, in order for all the participants to articulate their opinions, feelings, and personal experience in an unobstructed way, the language of questioning and responses with home students was mainly Chinese, while English was adopted

when interviewing international students. Considering that part of the foreign group might include students whose first language was not English, a code-switching (between Chinese and English) strategy was also adopted during the interview procedure.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was adopted in this study as the analytical tool to analyse data from documents and semistructured interviews. This section explains in detail the reason why I chose this analytic strategy and the major issues and procedures involved in the data analysis process.

#### 3.5.1 Rationale for a thematic analysis approach

Given its flexibility across a range of theoretical assumptions and research questions, and its compatibility with both essentialist and constructionist paradigms, thematic analysis was employed as the main method of data analysis for both the policy documents and the semistructured interviews.

As a fundamental method of qualitative analysis, thematic analysis is advantageous in terms of its flexibility and its ability to provide a detailed account of the data through identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis has the ability not only to report people's actual experience or reality, but also to provide a better understanding of the meaning underlying that reality by identifying patterned responses within the dataset related to the research questions. As my research is data-driven, it falls within the inductive approach, where codes may arise directly from the words or syntax of the raw data and increase appreciation of the information (Boyatzis, 1998). In addition, a semantic approach was chosen, as the process of analysis was to move from description to interpretation by seeking out the implications within the surface meaning of the data, that is, the policy documents and interview accounts. Further details relating to the analytic procedure used with the policy documents and individual interviews are discussed in the next section.

#### **(1) Transcribing**

In this study, both the Chinese and English interviewing audio records were transcribed into textual form to facilitate the follow-up data analysis process. In order to ensure consistency in understanding the data together with its context, and also to promote familiarity with the data from an analyst's point of view (Braun & Clarke, 2006), I, therefore, took the role of the interviewer, transcriber, and data analyst when transcribing all the face-to face interviews. The work of transcribing the interviews was undertaken immediately after the interviews. The

interviews were transcribed in their original language, that is, Mandarin Chinese (with Chinese participants) and English (with international participants) respectively. Transcribing the interviews helped me recall all the interactions, including nonverbal communication and ambiguity in the meaning or audio-recording that occurred during or after the interviewing process. Ultimately, this transcription work enabled me to gain a better understanding of the participants' accounts, as well as to restore the interview context at the utmost.

## **(2) Translating**

In a broad sense, this study draws on two sets of data: the policy documents of University X and the interview transcripts. Given the fact that the findings of the whole study had to be presented in English, I searched for policy documents relevant to my study using University X's official English website, so that I could analyse the raw data in their original language. As for the data from the interview transcripts, these raw data were a mixture of both Chinese and English. The challenge I faced at this stage was either to translate all the Chinese transcripts into English and then analyse all the English data together, or to analyse both Chinese and English transcripts in their original language, and then translate into English only those Chinese extracts that were to be presented as findings. As Chen (2009) noted, however, translating a data set literally from one language system into another one may distort the originality and authenticity attached to the cultural meanings of different linguistic forms. This point is backed up by Berreman (2004, pp. 184-185), who argued that:

People of different cultures and different languages categorise their experiences and the world around them differently, and they verbalise them in different ways. Liberal translation of words for objects, ideas, attitudes, and beliefs is often impossible.

Accordingly, I decided to code and analyse the interview transcripts in their original language, and to present the quotations from international students in their original language, i.e., English. Where necessary, I translated some Chinese words they used randomly in the conversation into English. I chose to present bilingual data regarding the Chinese transcripts, that is, to translate only those extracts used as findings into English, and to present both the original and translated forms together as the interview quotations. The purpose in doing so is to give readers the freedom to opt for their preferred language, and more importantly, to minimise any loss and misunderstanding of the interviewees' original meanings which may have occurred in the translation process.

## **(3) Coding**

In this study, I analysed the data manually without using any software. Before the data analysis,

I went to an NVivo workshop and gained a general idea about using this software. I also consulted a few PhD graduates. They suggested I could analyse data manually if the data set was not too big, as this would allow me to get to know the data very well and, therefore, analyse it better in the sense that I could more clearly see the relationships among all the factors. Armed with information from these perspectives, I decided on manual data analysis.

The data analysis was guided by the research questions. According to Wolf (2003), the transparency of the research design and analysis which documents the steps and decisions undertaken from the transcripts of raw data through to the final interpretation contributes to the establishment of an ‘audit trail’ which ensures the dependability of the findings of qualitative research. Therefore, the detailed procedures for coding individual interview data I used drew on the following steps; these accorded with Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six phases of data analysis:

- i. Familiarising myself with my data

In this initial phase, I became familiar with my data by transcribing the interview accounts myself, and then gradually identifying patterns through repeated reading of the verbatim transcription that informed an initial interpretation of the data (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999).

- ii. Generating initial codes

In the second phase, I organised segments of data into meaningful codes that were relevant to the research questions, and collated these together with their matching data extracts. To be more specific, I coded my data (i.e., policy documents and interview accounts) by taking notes and looking for potential themes. On the whole, the coding process was characterised by an interaction between theory-driven and data-driven approaches.

In the first stage, I coded the data from the policy documents of the target Chinese university, i.e., University X, by adopting a data-driven approach. I consulted relevant literature in the field of the internationalisation of higher education, paying special attention to concepts and theories such as internationalisation at home and curriculum internationalisation. These were used for my analysis of University X’s (internationalisation) policy documents, and in particular its missions and strategic planning for the promotion of students’ intercultural communication. This coding approach enabled me to identify those issues in the policy documents that were relevant to promoting students’ intercultural understanding and communication, and, therefore, to see how such issues were addressed in the university’s policy document. In doing so, I aimed to identify information that would provide answers to the first research question: *To what extent do the internationalisation policies of one Chinese university address the issue of promoting all*

*students' intercultural understanding and communication?*

The second stage of the coding process followed a data-driven approach. It focused on the data from the in-depth semistructured interviews. At this stage, I aimed to search for answers to my second question: *At one Chinese university, how do students experience the institutional system that is associated with the internationalisation policy of this university?* Bearing this question in mind, and in an attempt to examine how students' intercultural understanding and communication experience was either promoted or hindered by the institution's both formal and informal (internationalisation) curriculum, I paid special attention to participants' responses to and perspectives on both the formal learning context and other intercultural learning and communication opportunities outside the classroom.

The third round of the coding process also targeted the semistructured interview data, and was characterised by a mixture of data-driven and theory-driven approaches. In addition to drawing on Byram's ICC model, I also revisited the relevant literature relating to intercultural communication. In this round I sought concepts and theories that would help to make sense of and frame my analysis of the participants' intercultural communication experience, and thereby indicate the ways in which I could answer my third research question: *How do students perceive and make sense of their intercultural communication experiences?*

iii. Searching for themes

The theme-searching phase was basically characterised by a process in which divergent codes were classified and data extracts relevant to them collected to create potential themes and subthemes. As discussed above, a mixture of a data-driven and theory-driven approach dominated this stage. To begin with, the search for themes concentrated on theories and models of internationalisation that were concerned with promoting students' intercultural experience. Here, a systematic review and critical evaluation of the internationalisation policy and strategies of University X was carried out. The search was guided by the research questions which had been set at the outset of the study. The thematic analysis at this stage was, therefore, mapped onto pre-existing frameworks and models within the literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Secondly, the theme-searching process with regard to the interview data was data-driven within the inductive paradigm, with the emerging themes being interpreted and analysed by drawing on Byram's ICC model and theories within the field of intercultural communication and higher education internationalisation. To be more specific, working flexibly between two poles of essentialism and constructionism, which "acknowledge the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings" (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the students' accounts were interpreted with two specific objectives in

mind. My objectives were to align the understanding of participants' narrative accounts and reflections relating to their intercultural encounter experience with Byram's ICC model, on the one hand, and, based on the participants' reflective perceptions and understanding, to evaluate the effects of institutional policy and support on promoting students' intercultural understanding and communication, on the other. At the latter stage of this analytic procedure, the findings from the document analysis served as the overarching frame for evaluating how the university might develop and enrich its current internationalisation strategy to promote both home and international students' intercultural communication and communicative competence.

- iv. Reviewing themes
- v. Defining and naming themes
- vi. Producing the report

Stages 4, 5 and 6 were intertwined, and characterised by several recursive stages: 1) capturing the essential meaning that each theme represented by organising the corresponding data extracts into a coherent and consistent account; 2) refining all the themes through a detailed analysis of each theme and identification of the relation between themes; and, 3) identifying any subthemes that might also emerge at this stage through refining the initial themes to illuminate a hierarchy of meaning within the data.

The data analysis process proved to be complex and demanding. It evolved gradually, but eventually the phenomena and the issues in question became clear through the processes described above, and led to the development of the three chapters (chapters 4, 5, 6) of this thesis that answer the three research questions.

#### **(4) Member checking**

After completing the data analysis, I sent the findings chapters pertaining to the semistructured interviews (i.e., chapters 5 and 6) to several of the Chinese and international participants who were willing and available to review them. The participants were invited to examine my understanding of the meaning attached to their interview responses, and to see if their original meaning had been distorted or misunderstood. This member checking process enabled me to critically reflect on my own skills in analysing qualitative data, to identify any misinterpretation, and then to make changes in line with these participants' feedback and advice.



### 3.6 Researcher's Reflexivity

As the major instrument of data collection and analysis, the researcher's commitment to reflexivity has been raised to a methodological point where the effects of his/her perspectives, backgrounds or preconceptions should be explicitly acknowledged, though they may not be eliminated. Malterud (2001) further argues that reflexivity requires the researcher not only to initially proclaim his/her personal and professional experience relating to the phenomenon under investigation and the implicative preconceptions and beliefs that result from such experience, but also to recognise the extent to which his/her positions and perspectives may affect the data collection and analysis procedures. The next section, therefore, provides some information about my professional background in relation to the topic of this phenomenological research, followed by an acknowledgement of potential presuppositions that may affect my understanding of the participants' accounts.

First and foremost, my own expertise in the area of internationalisation and intercultural communication may, to some extent, run the risk of projecting my own knowledge and experience onto the process, as there is a possibility of my applying it as the lens through which to make sense of and evaluate the participants' own experience (Berger, 2013). For instance, the Chinese participants' opinions and negative evaluation with regard to the Intercultural Communication module they took part in at University X were totally dissimilar and contradictory to my own experience of attending and completing the Intercultural Communication module at the School of Education back in Durham where students were encouraged to engage with the themes and issues covered through interaction and critical discussion, student presentations of the literature, and group work activities. Thus, I discovered that the same module, when being taught in a different educational context, could result in quite diverse learning experience and outcomes. This realisation, therefore, made me more cautious about inadvertently projecting my own experience onto my understanding of the participants' accounts. At the same time, this insight allowed me to develop a critical view on the same phenomena.

Secondly, my outsider identity obviously created some practical difficulties for me as a novice researcher. The most challenging part of the research process turned out to be recruiting and inviting students who showed willingness and interest in the research to participate in interviews. In effect, it took me a while to establish mutual trust and build rapport with my participants and so I used the following strategy. First, I actively socialised with international students in the target department to gain the opportunity to discuss their learning and living experiences in China with them. I also shared my sojourn experience in the UK with them.

Gradually, through this interaction, I felt that the participants came to see me more as a student with whom they were familiar rather than as a researcher. Secondly, I showed great respect and gratitude for their participation in my research project by clarifying in advance that they would be given a gift as a thank-you for taking part in the interviews. Thirdly, I adopted an open-ended interview strategy in order to create an emotionally supportive and less stressful environment for the interviewees. Eventually, the more interviews I conducted, the more confident and reflective I found myself to be in leading the conversations. I was able, for example, to make these conversations more learner-centred, especially when I noted an attitudinal change in some participants who had initially showed reluctance and unwillingness to participate in an interview. I found that after several casual conversations and interaction at social events with such students that they began to show interest and a willingness to share their experiences with me; some even helped me by inviting their friends to take part in the interviews.

### 3.7 Ethics

The ethical consideration of this study complies with the standards set out in the Department Code of Practice on Research Ethics at Durham University. Ethical approval was obtained from the School of Education Research Ethics and Data Protection Sub-committee, Durham University prior to commencing the data collection process. The major issues for this study included, but were not be limited to: seeking the informed consent of the participants; guaranteeing the confidentiality of the information gathered and ensuring the anonymity of the participants' identities; and, preventing participants from experiencing emotional distress.

#### **1) Informed Consent**

As the first and most fundamental element of all ethical principles, gaining the participants' informed consent paves the way for establishing a rapport between the researcher and the participants, because it safeguards both parties against the danger of misunderstanding (Landridge, 2007). Prior to the interview process, each participant was provided with an information sheet (see Appendix C) outlining the following aspects of the research: the aim of the study; the significance of the interview for accomplishing the research objectives; the length and voluntary nature of engaging in the interview; and, the measures taken to guard against identification of the participants' personal information. Once the potential participants had fully understood this information, they were presented with a follow-up consent form (see Appendix D). By signing the consent form, participants gave their agreement to voluntary participation. Permission was also sought from the participants for audio-recording of the interview content

through the use of a tape-recorder, and further use of the information they had provided for data analysis. Participants were also informed in the consent form of their right to withdraw from the interview procedure at any time and without question.

## **2) Confidentiality and Anonymity**

In order to protect both the participants' identities and the information they provided during the interview, all the gathered data were handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Underpinning the principle of confidentiality is the protection of and respect for a participant's autonomy. In other words, no information relating to the lived experience of the participant should be disclosed without his/her permission (Wiles et al., 2009). Abiding by this doctrine, the electronic copies of the transcripts were held securely in password-protected files. The hard copies were also kept in a locked filing cabinet in my personal office. To ensure that none of the participants could be personally identified, I informed the participants individually before the interview that they had the right to remain anonymous. For reasons of anonymity, the name of the institution is not provided. When it came to reporting the findings of the semistructured interviews, other identifying markers such as places, departments, and universities were also disguised through the use of pseudonyms, but without losing the original meaning and intention.

## **3) Avoiding Emotional Distress**

To maximise the efficiency of each interview and to give full voice to each participant, it was essential that the participants were not emotionally distressed either by conversing with the researcher or by the environment in which they were interviewed. If I sensed any emotional discomfort on the part of a participant during an interview, I took the following steps. First, in order to create rapport and minimise the potential power dynamics between the participants and myself, something which could have been the result of my position as a PhD researcher and which could have resulted in emotional anxiety for the participants themselves, prior to each interview, I prepared some Chinese traditional gifts for the international participants. and some popular British food I had brought from England for my Chinese participants. Second, the site of each interview was decided by the participants themselves. The aim here was to make them feel more comfortable and relaxed. On several occasions, I had lunch and afternoon tea with some of my international participants while sharing their concern about living and studying in China. Finally, extra time was given to each participant at the end of each interview so that they could reflect on what the conversation had been like for them, and they were encouraged to make comments and/or further suggestions. They were also informed in advance that after the interview they had the right to amend any of the information they had provided and to check the researcher's interpretations with him regarding their responses.

### 3.8 Ensuring Quality—Trustworthiness

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), the criteria which apply to any study relate to its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Strategies to achieve these outcomes must be applied to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative research data. The following were, thus, taken into account during the implementation procedure, and throughout this study's finding and analytical processes.

#### **1) Credibility**

According to Shenton (2004), credibility in qualitative research deals with the congruence of the research finding with the reality. To ensure the trustworthiness of a qualitative study, Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer a set of procedures; these include: prolonged engagement; persistent observation; triangulation; peer debriefing; member checks; and, thick description. Considering the limitations of including all these procedures in one research project, credibility, when applied to the present study, was addressed in the following ways:

1. Prolonged engagement: Although the actual fieldwork period was not long, I had, as explained in a previous section, been involved with University X since 2014. I kept in touch with the department deans and some teaching staff at the beginning of my research period; I searched for journal articles and consulted the university's online website to identify information that was relevant to my research. All these efforts helped to create a basic foundation for understanding the research context, and to some extent, to build rapport with my participants.
2. Triangulation: Considering the limited number of research methods used in this research project, i.e., document analysis and semistructured interview, triangulation of methods was achieved by drawing on multiple theoretical perspectives, such as curriculum internationalisation, Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence, and intercultural dialogue theories, as a way to gain a rich understanding of the participants' intercultural communication experience from multiple perspectives. In addition, the context in which the participants' intercultural experiences took place and the internationalisation policy was implemented as also explained in detail.
3. Member checking and peer debriefing: These are considered to be the most significant strategy for ensuring credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Checking and confirming the

accuracy of the data, and in particular the interview transcripts used in this study, constituted the major means of verifying the researcher's understanding of the participants' accounts. In this research, the interview transcripts were presented to each participant so that they could confirm whether their articulation had been accurately captured and corresponded to their intention. Once the data analysis had been completed, depending on their availability and willingness to do so, some participants were also involved in verifying the accuracy and precision of the investigator's interpretation of their accounts. This strategy was utilised, as the potential contextual meaning of each piece of information provided by the participants was not always easily accessible by the researcher. After completing the fieldwork, and resuming my work in the UK, I took the opportunity to present my research work at seminars in my university and at international conferences in order to get feedback not only from peer research students, but also from senior researchers.

## **2) Transferability**

The concern over transferability often lies in the applicability of the research findings of a specific study to other settings or populations. Due to the idiographic nature of a qualitative case study, the research results are always restricted to and defined by a small number of individuals within specific environments, and, therefore, they are not considered as generalisable to a wider population or context (Merriam, 1998). Others dispute such a view by highlighting the need to demonstrate the contextual factors that influence each case by arguing that it is the responsibility of the researcher to reveal in detail the contextual information of the specific case, including its geographic location and its particular characteristics compared with the environments of other, similar studies (Denscombe, 1998; Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2000), so that readers can evaluate the applicability of the research findings to their own specific context. To this end, I attached great importance to thick description in this case study by looking at the rich details of the context of the institution studied and by sorting out the complex layers involved in conducting the fieldwork. As will be seen in the following three findings chapters, I provide much information about the context of this research and the institution studied. The current chapter also provides a detailed report of how I conducted this study. In doing so, I have aimed to allow other researchers to make decisions regarding the transferability (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Creswell, 2013) of the study, that is, how the outcomes of this study can be transferred to other settings.

### 3.9 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I first discussed my rationale for adopting social constructionism as the theoretical framework that guides the whole research process. The second half of this chapter dealt mainly with the methods used to collect and analyse data. Before providing a detailed description of those procedures, I first gave a brief justification for choosing a case study qualitative research approach, and then outlined the strategies used to get access to the research setting and sample. Then I presented a brief description of the pilot study, including the number of participants, its focus on the interview questions, and its significance for the main study. Next, the main methods used in the data collection and analysis were separately discussed. This discussion was broken into two phases, with each delineating in detail: 1) the rationale for choosing the specific method, sampling strategy, recruitment of participants, procedure; and, 2) the method of data collection and analysis. The chapter concluded with a discussion of several of the ethical issues involved in this study, and the criteria used to establish the quality of its research results.

## Chapter Four: Document Analysis of Internationalisation Policy

The three findings chapters (chapters 4, 5 and 6) aim to answer the three research questions respectively. This chapter focuses on the first research question identified in chapter 2:

*To what extent do the internationalisation policies of University X address the issue of promoting all student' intercultural understanding and communication?*

As stated in chapter 3, I drew on the document sources of University X' public website as the raw data to identify missions, supportive strategies, and events that purport to improve all students' global perspective and intercultural experience. This evaluation of the official documents also laid the foundation for the follow-up semistructured interviews and contextualised students' lived experience and perspectives within the specific culture of this particular Chinese university. The document data were analysed using a thematic analysis approach in a data-driven way. The themes identified have been strongly linked to the data themselves, in order to represent the ways in which policies address issues related to promoting students' intercultural understanding and communication.

Sections 4.1 and 4.2 present a review of the internationalisation of higher education in China and the internationalisation policy of University X respectively.

### 4.1 Internationalisation of higher education in China

Since its emergence and popularity among higher education sectors from the 1980s onwards, the concept of internationalisation has been widely utilised as an initiative in promoting student mobility and educational cooperation (Klasek, 1992). In addition, evolutionary changes have taken place in higher education institutions around the world as a response to the overwhelming forces of economic globalisation, in terms of their institutional policies, strategies, and services (Knight, 2012). Along with the increasing influence of commerce, marketisation, and privatisation, the concept of the "knowledge-based economy" has begun to impose competitive elements on the operation and management of higher education institutions. More and more concentrated attention has been given to the internationalisation outcomes, the number of established joint programmes, and the international ranking of individual institutions (Knight, 2012, p. 27). Without exception, all China's higher education institutions are also being confronted with the opportunities and challenges brought about by globalisation, especially since China became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001.

After joining the WTO, it became increasingly evident that the organisation's rules, standards, and principles would inevitably exert an ever-expanding influence not only on the way that the market economy is operated, but also on the management of higher education (Mok & Lo, 2007), given the fact that higher education serves as one of the WTO's guides for trading businesses (Huang, 2006). As with other Asian countries, education reforms in China have also undergone such global transformations as marketisation, commodification, and, more recently, the neo-liberal privatisation. Policies relating to these transformations have been written into the policy documents through which higher education enacts its strategic planning to encourage competition and benchmarking with world-class academic institutions (Mok, 2006). The ability to produce university graduates who are capable of communicating and behaving appropriately in a more globalised society gives a competitive edge to players within the higher education sector and so seeking this advantage acts as a significant driver that propels the administrators of China's universities to expand enrolments of high-quality students, raise the quality of their institutions' teaching and research, and improve service functions in an effort to win a higher position among the world university rankings and competition (Ngok & Guo, 2007).

Xu's (2010) review of Chinese top universities' strategic efforts in the face of the major challenges of internationalisation reveals their ambition to create a cross-cultural community and in so doing bridge the gaps with world-class universities that result not only from a tremendous loss of talented students, but also from the lack of international and intercultural experience on the part of both domestic and foreign students. He further highlights the importance of counterbalancing the number of 'imports' and 'experts' so as to expose nonmobile home students to a diversified cultural scenario, and subsequently reinforce mutual understanding and intercultural communication between both groups. Such initiatives inevitably entail a sustained collaboration with world-class institutions as well as the infusion and reinforcing of such international concepts as human rights and global ethics into the curriculum. In this process, it is imperative for top universities in China to be more proactive in participating in global competition which requires both 'inheritance' and 'reference', namely upholding China's traditional cultural heritage, while at the same time absorbing advanced experiences in internationalisation higher education from other countries. In light of the strategic choices of 'inheritance' and 'reference', the next section will present an overview of the internationalisation policy of University X, as not only the target institution of my qualitative case study, but also one of the top universities in China. This overview focuses especially on University X's endeavours to promote all students' intercultural understanding and communication.

## 4.2 A review of the internationalisation policy of University X



My review of the internationalisation policy of University X focuses on five main areas: 1) introduction of high-quality international education resources; 2) attracting foreign students; 3) faculty development; 4) extracurricular (intercultural) activities; and, 5) management of its administration system. I focus on these aspects because the review was driven by my analytic interest in their relevance to my first research aim—to present to China’s higher education organisations an understanding of how the policy of one particular university endeavours to develop intercultural understanding and communication in its students (both international and home). More specifically, each section starts with a brief elaboration of the policy which corresponds to these endeavours, before turning to relevant empirical studies within the literature. Furthermore, I draw on concepts and theories within the field of higher education internationalisation, i.e., curriculum internationalisation, internationalisation at home, and intercultural dialogue, and also on Byram’s ICC model, in order to explore the extent to which the emergent themes align with theories within the literature.

#### 4.2.1. Introduction of high-quality international education resources

The urgent demand for high-quality education products from those who are increasingly relying on their educational background as a way to gain a competitive edge in the employment market is a significant driver of the Chinese government’s policy to introduce high-quality overseas education resources into China’s higher education institutions. The core momentum behind this policy is that Chinese students will be able to gain English language proficiency, global perspectives, and the ability to communicate and behave properly in the intercultural and international environment (Tan, 2009) without having to study abroad. As a response to the National Outline for Medium and Long-term Educational Reform and Development, which provided a policy framework for educational strategic development (Liu, 2012), University X has put particular emphasis on talent cultivation and educational cooperation as its central strategies. Priority has, moreover, been given not only to equipping students with global perspectives and intercultural communicative competence, but also to the introduction of high-quality education resources, enhancement of mobility and exchange programmes, and attracting international students and professional teaching staff to the university. As regards its various acquisition strategies, University X foregrounds the introduction of updated versions of teaching materials from overseas; talented professionals; and, advanced managerial and assessment systems to meet the national demand for high-quality education products.

In terms of the development of students’ intercultural competence, these strategies correlate most closely with what Byram defined as “classroom learning” (1997, p. 65). In classroom

learning students are supposed to gain knowledge of relationships, especially relationships between cultures—thus, implying a comparative method—as well as knowledge of the processes of intercultural communication. He further argued that the advantage of placing relationships at the focus of knowledge teaching is that they are more easily linked to communication and the acquisition of language. The aim is to ensure that the learners acquire a systematic knowledge, not one which is simply the outcome of other factors such as the choice of teaching materials in a syllabus dominated by linguistic considerations.

What can be drawn from the above discussion is that the pedagogical impact of classroom teaching and learning lies not in either the choice of teaching materials or the assessment approach, but in its implications for intercultural communication outside the classroom. The advantage of this approach lies in its ability to foster the development of knowledge and skills that are conducive to intercultural communication outside the classroom. For this development to occur, however, the teacher needs to control time so as to provide enough time for reflection, a factor which I will discuss later in the section on faculty development.

Arguments relating to the prevailing and overwhelming influence of Eurocentrism on pedagogic approaches and curriculum design have also raised the question of developing students' reflective, analytical, and critical thinking skills embedded in courses of various disciplines in modern societies, as incorporating these is also seen as one of the decisive factors in realising curriculum internationalisation (Caruana & Spurling, 2007). It is in light of Byram's argument on classroom learning and the decisive role of developing students' reflective and critical thinking skills in promoting curriculum internationalisation that the current research seeks to explore the extent to which the new teaching and learning context, and in particular education resources such as teaching materials and assessment approaches, promote international students' development of knowledge and skills, and eventually their intercultural communication outside the classroom.

#### 4.2.2 Attracting foreign students

In line with its declared aims of becoming one of the world's top universities and developing all-round talent with global perspectives, University X is proactive in terms of increasing the demographic diversity of its student body to create an intercultural environment, especially with regard to taking in top-notch candidates from prestigious institutions around the world. To this end, University X provides a wide range of programme offerings for international students to choose from. The university offers degree programmes at various levels (i.e., undergraduate,

master's, doctoral), and nondegree programmes targeted primarily at visiting (exchange) students and research scholars. These particular courses are flexible in duration and range from one semester to one year. Noncredit bearing Chinese language courses, also known as short-term programmes, together with pre-university programmes enable international students to improve their Mandarin proficiency and to become familiar with knowledge relevant to their future study programmes.

The number of English-taught programmes across various disciplines have also been introduced in recent years, especially in the natural sciences sector, in an attempt to attract more overseas students.

It can be seen that University X's strategic plan to increase the presence of foreign students on-campus has added momentum to the internationalisation of the university's curriculum, given its potential to bring an international dimension to the content of the curriculum (Trahar, 2011), both pedagogically and linguistically.

However, research shows that the mere existence of international students does not guarantee increased intercultural engagement between international and home students. For example, Leask (2010, p. 13) notes that strategy relating to the enrolment of international students may run the risk of overlooking the intercultural experience and international learning outcomes of domestic students. For this reason, intentional approaches, such as a mentoring scheme, that enhance intercultural encounters for both international and home students inside and outside the classroom are advocated.

My thematic analysis with regard to University X's policy strategies to develop domestic students' international experience showed its overemphasis on sending students abroad. Student mobility takes various forms ranging from sending students abroad for degree and exchange programmes, engaging in joint education and research activities, undertaking summer internships, and attending international conferences. Overseas partnerships with prestigious universities, research institutions, and enterprises around the globe, such as Yale, Harvard, Oxford, Cambridge and others, predominate. A recent trend has seen a variety of talent training plans and programmes flourishing on the home campus; these include the distinguished freshmen overseas study programme, the summer research programme, and the summer course. These are dedicated to preparing the university's home students for overseas exchange programmes. However, this policy initiative relates to another pillar of high education internationalisation, that is, internationalisation abroad (IA), which is beyond the scope of my research project which focuses on internationalisation at home, and, therefore, does not contribute to reinforcing intercultural engagement and communication between home and international students in China. Investigating the lack of strategic planning to develop the

majority, nonmobile students' international and intercultural competence corresponds to the call within the literature for the lifting of domestic students' intercultural learning and communication experience to become part of the ICC/ICCC research agenda (Carrol & Ryan, 2005; Trahar, 2007).

Moreover, Clifford's (2010) study revealed that the lack of interaction between home and international students contradicted students' expectations of having, and awareness of the significance of, cross-cultural contacts in promoting their intercultural understanding and international perspectives. The work conducted by Harrison and Peacock (2010) in investigating home students' intercultural communication experience has revealed that the presence of large numbers of international students adds pressure to the workload of home students, especially when new knowledge and ways of thinking inevitably become immersed in their routine learning experience. In addition, the uncooperativeness of international students also engendered feelings of anxiety and frustration in home students.

In view of the potential challenges that result from merely concentrating on diversity in the student population and on enhancing the number of academic programmes for international students, I argue that University X's overemphasis on increasing international student numbers may result not only in its overlooking the domestic students' lived intercultural experience on campus and the dynamics and complexity of intercultural engagement and communication between home and international students, but also eventually affect the quality of their overall international learning outcomes.

#### 4.2.3 Faculty development

Recognising the limited effects that student mobility would have on the overall learning outcomes of the whole student body, a series of internationalisation schemes and associations have emerged throughout the world that focus on involving faculty members within their institutions in the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the move to internationalise the curriculum, as faculty are seen as significant in delivering the student learning curriculum (Leask & Beelen, 2009). In view of increased linkage of intercultural competencies to the curriculum internationalisation within the literature in defining the concept of internationalisation, the professional demand for educators to prepare students to compete in a globalised society has targeted teachers' ability to translate their own world-mindedness and intercultural competence into their teaching practices.

Research evidence has shown that the presence of international teachers and scholars has a direct and positive effect on bringing an international dimension, be it linguistically or ideologically, to the curriculum and campus life. Similarly, domestic academics with international experience are also likely to have contributing influence on initiatives aimed at curriculum internationalisation (O' Hara, 2009). As part of University X's strategic plan to internationalise its curriculum, attracting international faculty and getting them involved in intercultural exchange and communication scenarios have become a significant mission for the Office of International Relations (OIR). Among its faculty development strategies, the International Faculty Club initially took on the role of exchanging and bridging the gap between different ideas and accommodating the needs of international teachers and scholars from divergent regions of the globe. The club is dedicated to serving as a cultural and academic channel through which foreign faculty are not only able to better understand the Chinese culture and to be updated on developments at the university, but also to articulate their own difficulties and perspectives. Airing these can help improve the university's performance. To that end, the club organises two-weekly seminar sessions. These cover wide-ranging academic presentations on and discussions of different cultures, technologies. and customs. Above all, organisations of this kind help international faculty members from different departments to ally with each other, to make sense of the culture of the university and China, and to exchange ideas on pedagogy and personal needs.

Being devoted to establishing collaborative partnerships with world-class institutions around the globe, faculty exchange programmes are also flourishing at University X, with most teaching faculty maintaining constant academic and personal connection with world-renowned institutions. These contacts provide them with opportunities to share ideas and knowledge, as well as to learn about education practices in other countries.

Evidence from previous research also indicates that teachers with overseas learning or teaching experience are highly valued by both institution administrators and the international students themselves. For example, these teachers are valued for their potential openness to and respect for cultural differences, for being more flexible in teaching approaches, and for having empathy with and understanding of the difficulties that international students are confronted with in adapting to norms and interactive patterns of the new culture, and, therefore, for their ability to impart appropriate assistance in line with students' needs (Clifford, 2010).

However, findings from previous research suggest that there continues to be a gap between the institutional rhetoric of internationalisation and academic practice (Trahar, 2011, Green & Whitsed, 2013), which has led to the call for interactive pedagogies that provide a space for

both students and staff to include critical reflections on their own and others' academic backgrounds (Trahar, 2008).

This idea also accords with the priority that Byram (1997) gives to foreign language teachers regarding their responsibility to translate students' intercultural communication experience outside the classroom into actual learning. Fulfilling this responsibility entails a pedagogical structure and classroom methodology that stimulates students' reflection and critical analysis of their experience. This critical reflection is particularly important and can focus on the efficacy of the knowledge and skills learned in the classroom, and the need for further development. It can also focus on learners' affective responses to learning outside the classroom. All of this entails teacher training that goes far beyond what teacher exchange programmes or the presence of foreign faculty can provide.

Given that the beliefs or conceptions teachers hold have an impact on their teaching practices (Olafson & Schraw, 2006), and the fact that traditional Chinese learning culture is 'teacher-centred', 'exam-driven', aspects which seem incompatible with the dialogic learning model that is appreciated and has been popularised in the Western education context, it is imperative for the present study to explore international students' experience and perception with regard to the teaching practice of their Chinese language teachers and how that practice affects their intercultural communication beyond the classroom.

#### 4.2.4 Extracurricular (intercultural) activities

Being committed to implementing internationalisation policies and administering exchange and collaboration in joint research programmes, the OIR plays the predominant role in fostering mobility of students and faculty, providing support for international activities of all departments and organisations, organising and hosting international conferences and forums, and increasing the number of international students. In light of the endeavours and opportunities being implemented by the OIR to scaffold and integrate its overseas students, University X's website provides striking evidence that reflects the university's miscellaneous on-campus, culture-oriented activities. Currently, the university's International Culture Festival seems to be the main vehicle for promoting students' intercultural engagement. This festival comprises onstage performances by international students on the university site. These performances showcase the unique characteristics of the artifacts displayed in the exhibition booths representing the student groups' country and region. At the same time, the festival creates a platform for cultural exchange in which international students from the East and West can engage with each other. In

addition to term-time events and activities that provide opportunities for international students to get in touch with each other, there are miscellaneous extracurricular programmes and practices running during term breaks. For example, the International Students Summer Work and Travel Program was set up so that international students could gain voluntary teaching experience in remote regions of China, such as Qinghai and Yunnan. The Singing Contest for International Students is another such initiative. Its primary purpose is to enrich students' international and recreational experience, and to promote students' mutual understanding by increasing opportunities for their intercultural encounters.

The Ambassador-Student Dialogue Forum seeks to expose national Chinese students to intercultural dialogue with representatives from around the globe. There they can share and exchange their experience and opinions regarding overseas study. As a featured event of the International Culture Festival this forum also provides precious opportunities for domestic students with overseas study experiences to articulate their personal views and to make recommendations for deepening Chinese students' understanding of other cultures.

Students' own articulation of their international experience with programmes devised for general education and service learning (Brewer & Leask, 2012, p. 255) also reflected the significant advantage of intercultural contacts and international learning outside the classroom. However, Leask's study (2007) of both home and international students' lived experience of interaction revealed a gulf between internationalisation at home policies and the actual interactive experience between these two groups. Although contextualised in UK universities, this study may have implications across institutions worldwide, as the experience of international students appears to show that they are constantly dissatisfied with the lack of integration with local students. Their lack of contact with home students results in their feeling isolated, and this sentiment affects their overall competence development and international experience (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001; Middlehurst & Woodfied, 2007). This concern inspired the present study's examination of the extent to which institutional activities promote integration between home and international students. Therefore, its findings have implications for policy-makers and they can draw upon these to fill the gap within their own institutions' internationalisation at home policy initiatives.

There also appears to be a link between University X's policy of implementing extracurricular activities and Byram's conceptualisation of fieldwork and independent learning, that is, intercultural learning and communication beyond the classrooms. Such experience is valuable, provided that it involves teacher-led reflection on the students' intercultural communication experience outside the classroom.

As Jackson (2012, p. 458) suggests, programmes seeking to build in experiential activities that require sustained intercultural contact and relationships with people who have been socialised in a different cultural environment may enable sojourners to apply their intercultural communication skills and to evolve knowledge and local sociopragmatic norm, provided there is sufficient scaffolding and ongoing support. These programmes can also help newcomers develop a sense of belonging in the host environment, thereby facilitating both language and intercultural learning and adjustment. However, Harrison and Peacock's (2010) study revealed little significant cultural change regarding the student-institution relationship, and the perceptive shift in international students from playing the role of academic tourist to becoming autonomous agents or cooperative partners who are fully involved in the intercultural communication process as a source of cultural capital and intentional diversity. This point also highlights the importance attached to interventions provided during students' study abroad stays, for instance, the importance of "experiential learning, structured reflection, opportunities to engage with host nationals" (Paige & Goode, 2009; Vande Berg, 2007). It was my interests in areas such as these that promoted my research interest in exploring the extent to which extracurricular activities help develop students' attitudes, knowledge, and skills, and also promote their engagement with and sense of belong to the host community.

### 4.2.5 Management of the administration system

As part of its orientation programme, the Office of International Relations based at University X is responsible each year for organising various activities for all its newly recruited international students. Orientation endeavours to help students to familiarise themselves with local culture and to better adapt to campus life. New international students can, for instance, attend public lectures in relation to Chinese laws and regulations and visit scenic spots and historical sites in this large city in China. Among its mission divisions, the International Students Division is devoted to providing comprehensive information and first-hand services to international students who are currently studying and or intending to study at University X. The preliminary focus of this division is to enact and implement admission and administration policies for international students, as well as to manage students' profile and matters related to visa application. Among the university's prioritised commitments, organising extracurricular activities and cultural highlights excursions appear to be the interventions that contribute the most in terms of facilitating sojourners' exposure to the new social and cultural environment and to local nationals.



The orientation sessions and activities the OIF offers newly arrived international students deal with matters relating to residency in China and cover things such as physical examinations, immigration information sessions, and residence permit procedures. The OIR also arranges Chinese language proficiency tests and gives out course selection forms to visiting students. The orientation programme for the 2014/15 winter semester reflected the collaborative endeavour of the OIR, along with the Financial Department, Computer Centre, medical insurance company, Entry-Exit Inspection and Quarantine Bureau, and other pertinent departments. These offer a one-stop admission service for new international students, including introducing to them the school policies, regulations, and scholarship, in order to acquaint them with their new living environment. The volunteer teams that are composed of current international students also make a significant contribution as they act as guides who help the freshmen to adapt to the new community, in particular by virtue of their relative language advantages.

The commitment of University X's administration system, and the OIR in particular, to managing foreign students' admission affairs, including implementing orientation programmes, residential arrangements, and offering language assistance accords with Bergan and Restoueix's (2009) identification of endeavours to promote intercultural dialogue. They emphasise the importance of the following forms of support: 1) the support that the university administration accords to students in terms of providing them with information on practical problems, accommodation, study guidance, the various permits they may need, and, sometimes, pastoral care; 2) linguistic support through training courses in the host country's language and measures that facilitate students' adjustment to the teaching methods of the given country, or giving students the option to have part of the syllabus taught in a lingua franca, usually English. However, Bergan and Restoueix (2009) also argue that such measures are limited in that they engender practical bases for foreign students' adjustment and intercultural communication at a preliminary level only, and so cannot ensure effective and ongoing intercultural dialogue. The gap pinpointed by Bergan and Restoueix informed my research which set out to explore the extent to which University X's administration system helped international students to connect better with the local cultural environment, and how specific pressures encountered by foreign students and their management of the minutiae of everyday academic life were alleviated (or not) by the university's administration system.

Moreover, findings from previous research show that while transitioning into a new academic and cultural environment, it is inevitable that sojourners may be confronted with issues of adaptation and adjustment, which are, in most cases, attributed to an acknowledged cause—culture shock, a term coined by Oberg (1960, p. 177) to refer to the “anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse”. As a consequence, cross-cultural adaption and the factors that affect sojourners' acculturation process need the attention

of education policy makers and administrators who have to work out strategic actions to facilitate an easy transition for this diverse student body i.e., new international students, into a unique academic and sociocultural environment. Kim's (2012, pp. 236-238) identification of factors that may give rise to individuals' adaptation process can be grouped into two broad categories the first of which concerns environmental factors. These are 1) host receptivity; 2) host conformity pressure; and, 3) ethnic group strength. The second category relates to factors that are concerned with individuals' own predispositions. They include 1) preparedness; 2) ethnic proximity/distance; and 3) personality predisposition. Among those factors, Kim further argues that the variables that fall within the environmental arena help define the relative degrees of 'push-and-pull' that a given host environment presents to the individual. To be more specific, individuals who perceive the receiving environment as welcoming, hospitable, and tolerant are more likely to show positive engagement and integration with the host culture.

It can be seen from Kim's argument that transitioning into a new living and learning environment has a positive influence on an individual's attitudinal development—moving from anxiety to being well-adapted—and that environmental factors within the host community play a key role in that development. This view also accords with one of Byram's defined attitudinal objectives, i.e., "readiness to experience the different stages of adaptation to and interaction with another culture during a period of residence" (1997, p. 58), and helped to awaken my interest in exploring the extent to which foreign students' interaction with an institution's administration system affected their development of attitudes that enable them to "cope with their own different kinds of experience of otherness (e.g. enthusiasm, withdrawal) during residence and place them in a longer term context of phases of acceptance and rejection" (p. 58).

### 4.3 Chapter summary

In this chapter I have reviewed the internationalisation policy, covering the internationalisation of higher education in China and presented a review of the internationalisation policy at University X. The findings from my review of University X's policy initiatives and strategies to promote students' intercultural understanding and communication showed that the university's approach corresponded to theories of higher education internationalisation found within the literature.

The first three policies which I examined resonate with strategies embedded in curriculum internationalisation in terms of their potential to bring an international dimension to the content

of the curriculum (Trahar, 2011) both pedagogically and linguistically. However, placing a strong emphasis on introducing high quality education resources and attracting international students and professional teaching staff cannot of itself guarantee the development of students' attitudes, knowledge, and skills. In fact, over-reliance on such strategies may run the risk of overlooking students' intercultural communication outside the classroom,

The policy regarding the implementation of extracurricular (intercultural) activities, although it reflects University X's intention to expose both international and home students to various intercultural activities, can contribute effectively to its internationalisation at home initiative only when intentional and ongoing interventions are provided in support of integration between international and home students, and especially those interventions that aim to promote the development of the intercultural competence of the majority, nonmobile home students.

My thematic analysis of the commitment of University X's administration system, and the Office of International Relations in particular, to foreign students' various affairs correlates with Bergan and Restoueix's (2009) identification of measures which universities can deploy to promote not only intercultural dialogue, but also enhance an individual's development of attitudes (Byram, 1997). However, offering just preliminary level practical measures that can help international students' adjustment and intercultural communication may not lead in the longer term to effective and ongoing intercultural dialogue.

Given the existing limitations and potential gaps embedded in University X's policy regarding its internationalisation initiatives, and specifically issues relating to the promotion of all students' intercultural understanding and communication, the next chapter examines the students' experience with the institutional system and the elements of it that are associated with its internationalisation policy. I then compare issues discussed in this chapter with the views of the international students to see how this particular institution's attempts to internationalise was experienced by the students themselves.



## Chapter Five : Students' Intercultural Communication Experiences with the Institutional System Inside and Outside the Classroom and with the Wider Community

The preceding chapter examined how the internationalisation policy of University X addresses issues relating to promoting all students' intercultural understanding and communication. Such findings provide guidance for examining the follow-up research question with which this chapter is concerned: How do students experience the institutional system that is associated with its internationalisation policy? In other words, this chapter deals with the implementation of the curriculum internationalisation policy, with a specific focus on the delivery of internationalisation at home through both formal and informal curricula.

This chapter draws primarily on the data drawn from the experience of international students; where relevant, I also refer to the experiences of home students.

The thematic analysis of this chapter draws on Byram's model of ICC as the theoretical framework to examine the extent to which the institutional system promotes students' development of intercultural communicative competence. In accordance with the document analysis regarding University X's internationalisation policy in the preceding chapter, five major aspects are addressed and discussed within this chapter. Section 5.1 deals with international students' perception of their teachers and learning experiences; section 5.2 explores students' intercultural communication experience inside the classroom; section 5.3 is concerned mainly with the international students' intercultural communication experiences outside the classroom and with the wider community; section 5.4 makes sense of the students' experiences with the university's administration system; and, section 5.5 compares students' experience of the institutional interventions and activities (as discussed above) with the relevant policy (as discussed in chapter 4).

### 5.1 Engaging with a new teaching and learning context

According to Hammond and Gao (2002), the Chinese classroom has long been dominated by a dialectic model of learning. Also known as traditional learning, this model tends to be "fragmented, linear, competition-oriented, and authority-centered" (pp. 228-229). Thus, when learning in a new academic setting and being confronted with different ways of knowing, the participants were stimulated to reflect upon salient features of the new teaching and learning context, and to what extent that academic setting facilitated or restrained their development of

communicative competence. In this regard, the discussion in this section concentrates on three major areas: the authority of teachers; participating and interacting; exam-oriented education.

#### 5.1.1 Authority of teachers

Influenced by Confucian rules, China has always been, and remains, a cultural, political, and social hierarchy. This hierarchical culture requires authority, responsibility, and wisdom from superiors and loyalty, obedience, and dedication from subordinates (Watkins & Biggs, 2001). As a result, Chinese teachers are used to a one-way model of knowledge transmission, and Chinese students appear to be reluctant to make comments and express disagreement in group discussions because of their concern for social harmony within the group. (Carson & Nelson, 1996)

To some extent, the teachers' concern for and emphasis on promoting students' communicative competence and intercultural knowledge noted in the present study led some of the participants to regard their teachers as responsible and helpful. For example, Matthew appeared to appreciate the way that his language teacher assigned homework to the class which enabled him to discern the differences between the target culture and his own culture, and more importantly to deepen his understanding about aspects of the Chinese culture, such as family rituals:

*The best assignments for me are the teacher assigning us to go to ask the Chinese students about our cultural differences, or about Chinese culture...I really like my teacher, Dongfang; he gives us a lot of homework that is asking Chinese students about cultural differences. He asks us to go and ask our Chinese friends in a Chinese family what kind of things that the host should be taking responsibility for. It's a great opportunity for me to bring really good questions to my language partner. (Matthew)*

Matthew's account was echoed by James, who spoke highly of the teacher's role in creating an active and engaging classroom environment, and in promoting communicative practices:

*I think the teachers are quite good and they make me talk and practise in class, talking and giving an example; [they] make you practise and make you active in the class. Actually, my language course helps me to change my conception about Chinese people. (James)*

The above accounts seem to indicate that the closer the relationship between teachers and students, the more intense the commitment of the participants to the project of learning. A trusting relationship between teacher and student minimises antagonism and maximises mutual understanding and good interpersonal relationships influence students' learning outcomes and enhance the quality of learning (Hassan et al., 2010). Nevertheless, the data suggest that there were two totally opposite points of view regarding the teachers' expertise in harnessing their

relations with students, as some participants perceived 'authority' from their teachers which the students saw as manifesting as a lack of concern for students' needs:

*We have mentioned to her in the past that we think that she assigns too much homework, and things like that. She just disregarded our comments. She would say 'to be the best, you can't complain about anything', which is very Chinese. (Marilyn)*

Culturally, due to the pervasive influence of Confucian ideas, teachers are viewed as knowledge holders in China. The teacher-student relationship is one of trust. The teacher is in a position of authority and the student is in the position of being obligated to comply with the legal directives of the adult (Chory & McCroskey, 1999). However, this model of the relation between a teacher and student seems incompatible with Western educational philosophy, which grants a fair degree of freedom to students. This freedom allows them to actively voice their views and to share ideas whenever they are involved in group discussion or carrying out a given assignment. The purpose of this freedom is to maximise their role in creating an effective learning and teaching activity (Lin, 2008). Conflicting conceptions with regards to the teacher-student relationship emerged prominently from the international participants' accounts. Michelle, for example, recollected her experience of raising queries in class, a behaviour which was deemed as 'challenging' and 'rude' to the teacher:

*But the way we are used to learning is that, you have to question the teacher if you think they are wrong, you have to question them. But it's not rude to the teacher; it's just a way of learning. And I think I have done that before in class, whereas I felt like...they (i.e., Chinese teachers) thought I was just challenging them for fun, but actually it was because I had questions. I was not sure, so I asked. (Michelle)*

The above accounts indicated that foreign students who come from a university system that places more reliance on students organising their own studies had difficulties coming to terms with the more top-down educational systems they experienced at University X.

As mentioned in chapter 2, a prominent feature of traditional Chinese education is its emphasis on maintaining a hierarchical but harmonious relationship between teacher and student. Students are expected to respect and not to challenge their teachers. The reverence with which a teacher is held is reflected in many popular sayings, one of which states "being a teacher for only one day entitles one to lifelong respect from the student that befits his father". Confucian rules lie behind Chinese aphorisms such as this. These rules expect learners to respect and obey authority figures, and, in this case, the teacher-student relationship is characterised as a hierarchical one. Therefore, superiors (teachers) have absolute authority over their subordinates (students). Students are expected to respect and not to challenge their teachers (Wang, 2007).

Apart from the 'authority' and 'superiority' on the part of the Chinese language teachers that some of the international participants perceived, another critical issue, i.e., teachers' knowledge of their discipline, also emerged from the data as a second theme:

*In Chinese there are a lot of words that have the same meaning in English, but have very subtle differences, like 自然 and 天然,. I asked my translation teacher to explain the difference the other day, and she just could only give the examples, but she couldn't actually explain what the difference was, and it happened so many times. So, we were asking her in Chinese, when do you use 天然, and when do you use 自然, and she wasn't very good at explaining it. She always says 'I will come back to you'. But I [was] just kind of expecting that...if I have a grammatical word and some questions, then they would be able to answer me, but when they can't, it's kind of, to be honest, [you] lose the respect for the teacher. (Michelle)*

Such a finding accords with Cortazzi's (1990) prediction that the teacher's frankness about 'not being sure of the matter' did decrease the authoritativeness of the teacher's image in the student's eye. As such, it seems that, from Michelle's viewpoint, the teacher's failure to clarify her confusion and misunderstanding on a matter about which she expected her teacher to be knowledgeable gave rise to a loss of authority and professionalism on the part of the teacher, on the one hand, and consequently had a negative influence on her learning outcomes as a student, on the other. Marilyn expressed a similar opinion about the teachers' inability to give an appropriate explanation when queried about a matter related to his/her discipline. That concern was also echoed by Michelle:

*Every time I ask a professor why something is, the only answer they say is 'This is our rules'. They can't explain if you ask them why, there is no why. (Marilyn)*

The extracts above show that power and power dynamics still play an important role in Chinese higher education, at least according to this study. Heavily influenced by the traditional cultural values of China, that is, "ordering relationships by status and observing this order (zun bei you xu; 尊卑有序)" (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998, p. 18), Chinese people of low status tend to take obedience, respect, and submission to their superiors for granted. Hence, it was not easy for a superior to readily listen to and accept subordinates' views, as was the case with the Chinese teachers and their international students. This finding appears to support Chen and Day (2014). In their study they asserted that changing current teaching practices to more student-oriented teaching practices was possibly the most problematic issue for Chinese teachers, since implementing such a transformation would, by definition, challenge not only the existing



purposes, practices, values, and beliefs of many teachers, but also the continuing prioritisation of examination success required by China's highly competitive secondary education and higher education system. Teachers' belief systems about the nature and purposes of phenomena such as teaching and learning strongly influence how they teach and what students learn and achieve (Fives & Buehl 2012). However, as Jones (2010, pp. 139-140) argues, the critical factor that determines the possibilities for intercultural dialogue within the student learning experience is academics' attitudes towards and their awareness of how culture impacts on their own behaviour, along with knowledge of the cultural background and motivations of their students. As such, teachers become key agents of transformation within the internationalisation agenda, transforming the 'international classroom' (a place where different cultures meet) into an 'internationalised classroom' (a place where different cultures meet and *learn from each other*). In this regard, the findings from this study shed a new light on the possibility of intercultural dialogue that foregrounds an equal status between Chinese teachers and their international students.

#### 5.1.2 Participating and interacting

The reality that the dialectic culture of teaching dominates the classroom discourse at the host institution figured prominently in this study. According to Ho et al. (2004, p. 7), the complete authority of the teacher and transmission of knowledge are celebrated in the dialectic classroom. However, the reactions of international students who come from individualist cultures that favour a dialogic approach to teaching which tends to be more student-centred and to emphasise interaction and the social construct of knowledge are more likely to be sceptical when they encounter more rigid spoon-feeding methods of teaching.

#### **More 'reading' than 'speaking'**

The interactive and communicative approach that underpins the pedagogy across the Western world gives priority to students' involvement within classroom activity, which, to some extent, explains the participants' preference for verbal participation and practices in the language classroom:

*Maybe one thing I would say about our classes which haven't met my expectations would be, in our oral classes, there should be a lot of speaking, should be conversations in our lesson, but a lot are still reading, just reading out the texts, so we get an essay, you have to read aloud, we have some conversation practices, a little bit, but not enough. Because I would expect that*

*maybe we have a debate and a discussion in class, just more conversation, more actual speaking. (Struan)*

As far as this point is concerned, a common perception amongst the participants was that the teachers tend to take 'teaching by reading' for granted, imparting textbook knowledge without debate and argument. In this regard, Michelle had had a similar experience to Struan:

*There is no discussion, it's just we read that article, and she then explains the article, there is no argument or debate about the article, whether we think the article is right. It would help as well if the teachers seem to check that we knew what was going on, that we understood what we were taught, something like that in class, but she just taught us, and didn't question or test us. (Michelle)*

Research elsewhere has shown that the Chinese education system does not emphasise study skills, and, therefore, that Chinese students tend to be weaker at skills such as critical analysis, oral presentation, and problem solving (Davey & Higgins, 2005; Davey & Yuenong, 2005). Here, Michelle's account seems to imply a perceived paradox of the Confucian-Western dichotomy. This paradox indicates a contradiction between rote learning and criticality. Rote learning features a teacher-dominated mode of teaching in which traditional pedagogical approaches like the grammar-translation method and audio-lingualism predominate. That mode offers teachers maximum planning, control, and opportunities to transmit knowledge and this mode is favoured by most Chinese teachers, and was, according to students' reports, the style of teaching that was used in their classrooms at University X. However, this style of teaching was apparently alien to most of the international participants, as it did not accord with their inherited reference frame which conceived of both communication and interaction as effective learning channels and desirable skills to acquire. Discussion of the differences in these two approaches to teaching and learning usually triggered the participants' reflection upon different cultural practices and values around learning and teaching strategies:

*Because a lot of the times in the classroom, the teachers will read the vocabulary, but I don't really feel like they are teaching us, so I would have to preview all the text and lessons, and look up all the words that I don't know in the readings by myself first, and then do it earlier than what my teacher will teach it in order to catch up with the way they were teaching. So, it's sort of like I am already teaching myself anyway, but I just need maybe a one-on-one tutor or something to fix my pronunciation, or explain why something is said in a certain way. (Marilyn)*

This finding provides evidence to support a previous report that disclosed the deficiencies in the current Chinese education system when it made special reference to "too much reading aloud and individual reading by students" without sufficient teacher explanation and practice which may result in students' poor reading and comprehension abilities (Beijing Report, 2006, pp. 79-

80). In this regard, some participants stated their belief that oral practice was not essential in Chinese learning culture, and, explicitly, that expressing one's ideas was not encouraged either:

*But the method of learning is...we have our textbook, and the focus is getting through the textbook, reading and finishing the textbook. So, the teacher always says we now have no time for speaking because we are going to read these new words, it would be better to make along the words from the book, but I am not sure reading at text is that an important issue, speaking and actually using the words is not. (Struan)*

According to Struan, the best way to learn a language or new words is actually to use it/them, but what he found frustrating in terms of talking to a Chinese person was that he did not actually know how to use the words he had learned as a result of insufficient communication practice in class. In Chinese learning culture, class time is too precious to be wasted on an individual's idiosyncratic understanding of an issue, and precious class time should be effectively used for the teacher to deliver structured knowledge. However, such an environment seems incompatible with what Davies and Ecclestone (2008) defined as a learning culture celebrated across Western countries. That culture features a complex environment made up of the interplay of teachers, learning tasks, students, and their backgrounds. Rather than emphasising courses or programmes, this approach foregrounds the significance of the interactions and practices that take place within this culture.

### **Limits of textbook knowledge**

In addition to noting what they saw as excessive emphasis on reading and transmission of textbook knowledge that downplays the importance of interaction and students' participation, the interviewees also consistently criticised the textbooks, which were inadequate in meeting the international students' intercultural communication needs outside the classroom. To varying degrees, some of the participants thought that the textbooks did not assist their daily interaction with locals sufficiently. In the interviews the participants tended to use words such as 'outdated', 'lagged behind' and 'not useful' to describe their perceptions of the textbooks, as exemplified in the following accounts:

*In addition, our textbooks are very outdated, because I think the Chinese language has changed a lot; we can study all the grammar points, and it's still never to understand what Chinese people say in their everyday life. There is still disparity between the modern Chinese language and the language in the textbook, which seems to be 10 years [lagged] behind. (Matthew)*

*Some of the books are not updated, as my friend in the intermediate course says they're still using a really old book being published 10 years ago or*

*something, some really outdated words that you wouldn't use in everyday life now. (Marilyn)*

The above accounts suggest that the international participants cast doubt on the practicality of the textbook they used in class in terms of its connectedness to and facilitation of daily conversation outside the classroom. In support of such a viewpoint, George gave a detailed interpretation:

*But in general, you know Chinese is about a lot more than that, it is not just the words you have learned recently, it is not just the grammar you have learned recently. Again I understand that they want to include those things, that I feel like if you stick too rigidly to the textbook, it is not a very original, it means that... you should encourage people to try and learn Chinese outside of the textbook, because the textbook, for example, the Chinese there it can be a bit outdated, it can be a bit...you know that the Chinese you read in the textbook, it's not necessarily how you would speak to your friends or to other people of your age. (George)*

According to Hutchinson and Torres (1994), textbooks are not just classroom materials packaged in a particular format. Rather, they provide a structure for the management of the lesson as a social interaction and a basis for negotiation between all the relevant parties. Generally speaking, learners get used to taking the textbook as a 'framework' or 'guide' that helps them to organise their learning both inside and outside the classroom. However, the finding of this study seems to cast doubt on the ability of textbook knowledge to reinforce international participants' intercultural communication outside the classroom.

### 5.1.3 Exam-oriented education

Public examinations play a pivotal role in Chinese society and are cited by practically all sources as one of the major obstacles to curriculum reforms. Despite various efforts, tests still tend to be mainly about the retrieval of information from textbooks. As a result, most students focus on what is in their textbooks as the best way to get high marks on the tests. This system clearly indicates strong cultural attitudes in favour of more rigorous, academic, and examination-oriented education (Wang, 2013). This section, therefore, aims to show how the international participants negotiated such new learning and assessment norms.

#### **Excessive workload**

China has a strong public examination society with high-stakes consequences for students based on the test scores achieved. This situation is used by Chinese society to reflect the quality of both teachers and schools; hence, Chinese teachers, perhaps to meet societally approved goals or perhaps to protect their own standing in a school, have to prioritise maximum performance on the externally administered tests (Brown & Gao, 2015). As a result, Chinese students are burdened with a heavy academic workload at virtually every level of education. In addition, the Chinese pursuit of cultivating academically promising students underpins this phenomenon. Hence, teaching is geared towards examinations. Rote learning dominates classroom teaching and students are weighed down by excessive homework and examination pressure (Jin, Cooper, & Golding, 2016). One of this study's interesting and surprising findings was that the international participants in it also implied that achievement orientation was encouraged in learning, in that the students felt that they were being encouraged to simply comply with the 'prescriptions' of course requirements which they felt were onerous rather than engaging. The following student comment was typical of their views:

*Because I am busy with a lot of homework and have no spare time to communicate with Chinese or other international students. But if I only wanted to study Chinese language, I can even do it in Japan; the reason why I came to China is because I want to communicate with Chinese people, and see for myself what China is like in reality. I think it would be better if the teacher could understand our intention and expectations in coming to China. (Kaho)*

Kaho feelings were echoed by Marilyn and Hannah, who further explained how the heavy workload impeded their ability to socialise and make friends with local students outside the classroom:

*I definitely came here expecting to interact with more Chinese people, but because the Chinese language programme is really intensive, a lot of my time is spent inside my classroom, or even when I am outside the classroom, I am studying or preparing for exams. So, I don't think University X gives foreign students enough free time for them to interact with native students. (Marilyn)*

*There are a lot differences from my university at home, because here you have to be all the time in class, and you have to hand in your homework, and every day we have a dictation. And at [my] home university, you have a lot of freedom, and a lot of independency; you are more independent, so if you come to class or not, and only at the end you have to write an essay, but not have homework every day, it's more like in high school now. (Hannah)*

In fact, Hannah's perception of the different learning culture between China and her home country shed a new light on the inherent conceptions of learning that feature in most Western

classes. These conceptions gave students the right to manage and take charge of their own learning. The approach focuses on the development of soft skills by encouraging students to be innovative, independent, and responsible for their own learning process (Hassan et al., 2010). However, the intensive language courses and excessive workload found at University X appeared to be at odds with their autonomous learning culture, and, as a consequence, Chinese practices impeded participants' ability to interact with more Chinese people.

### **Assessment approach**

On examining the current assessment realities in China, Chen (2009) maintained that one of the salient consequences of the dominance of tests is the product-oriented learning approach, an approach which obviously appears to be at odds with the principles of the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach. As a result, the data in this study show that not only were the content of the tests criticised for putting too little emphasis on the relationship between real life and the subjects studied, but that the style of exam questions also led to complaints about not assessing students' practical skills:

*For example, the exams here, like the oral exams, for me the oral exam should be chatting with the teachers; they teach us, they question, and we have to think and reply, that's for me a good test. Actually, at University X what happens is, you go in and you have a sheet of paper, and you have things you have to read, and then grammar, things you have to do, and they give you words and you have to use the words in a sentence. I don't think that's a very effective test, because it's testing you really on the textbook, and specifically all of the words that you have learned, but nothing else. (George)*

George's comment indicated a contrast in the ways speaking skills are tested in the Western and Chinese education systems. In general, the examination content in China remains in line with traditional rote learning methods (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). Thus, the function of examinations is accepted in Chinese society as "a fair indicator of students' academic success" and they are "the goal of teaching and learning" in general (Cheng & Curtis, 2009, p. 267). To survive and excel within this "relentless and harsh" (Watkins & Biggs, 2001, p. 3) assessment climate, Chinese students have been trained or are naturally oriented to the so-called "learning for tests" mode. However, the style of exam questions has also been criticised by some Chinese educators for placing too much weight on testing subject knowledge and theory embedded in the textbooks, instead of on the student's ability to solve problems or carry out practical tasks (Zhang, 1995) such as those involving interaction with language teachers, and which George mentioned as an informal way of assessing students' speaking skills. In this regard, George further elucidated his concern for this 'rigid' and 'learning for tests' mode of examination system:

*But I think if the exams stick only to the textbook, if they are too rigid, then it means that people get the idea that you just learn what's in the textbook and then you do well at Chinese. I think obviously that's true to a degree, but it doesn't make people understand that there is a lot of Chinese that is not in the textbook, and that's also important. So, I think more of that should maybe be tested as well. (George)*

George's perception accords with previous studies that indicate Chinese learners' tendency to take an instrumental attitude towards study and to view high academic scores as the goals for their study efforts (Gao, Zhao, & Cheng, 2007; Wang & Cheng, 2009). That is, a surface approach to improvement and to the achievement of high-level cognitive skills is a striking feature in their behaviours (Ho, Peng, & Chan, 2001), and they usually try to understand the learning materials in ways that they perceive will meet requirements, and adopt the most convenient approaches to maximise their grades (Tang & Biggs, 1996). In effect, George's experience was not uncommon among the international participants, with Marilyn critically commenting on the way the speaking exam operated in her department:

*For example, we just had exams, and our speaking exam was split into 2 days, and one of the days it was, like, completely a writing exam for speaking, which doesn't make sense because it is a speaking exam, so it was taught very much as if it was a writing class. The speaking exam is just about writing, so it would be like filling the blanks, writing vocabulary, or giving us a sentence and you will have to write which idiom would match that sentence, to discard that sentence. But you don't speak it, you write it, so it doesn't make sense to me. (Marilyn)*

In fact, Marilyn's comments reflect, to a large extent, the conventional format of examinations in a foreign language programme in the Chinese education system. Such examinations emphasise reading comprehension and do not accurately indicate students' communicative competence (Cheng, 2008). It appeared that the international students felt the same way about the teaching and testing of their oral skills as they did about textbook knowledge and critical thinking, as indicated in the earlier sections of this chapter.

In short, the above finding suggests that assessment was not designed to value or draw upon the varied skills and experiences of the students, and that all marks were based on the final product. Thus, the Chinese system is fundamentally different from the assessment for learning approaches taken in the Western educational environment where incremental tasks and 'low stakes' learning and assessment are emphasised. The disparity between the two approaches to assessment suggests, therefore, that the wider teaching, learning, and assessment context can have an impact on student perceptions of intercultural learning.

#### 5.1.4 Summary

The international students' embedded learning styles and especially their learning skills which included much less reliance on the teacher and textbooks, and more reliance on autonomous and independent learning, critical thinking, and verbalising of ideas in class, etc. did not translate very well to the host learning setting. The perception of the students was that their academic programmes appeared simple, unengaging, and straightforward, and seemed to run counter to the complexity and ambiguity in the learning embedded in social practices. In other words, the international students in this study appeared to be very much concerned with aligning themselves with a distinct social group, and this, rather than any academic or professional motivation, seemed to be their driving force. Moreover, all the factors discussed in this section may, to some extent, inhibit overseas student from actively participating in classroom discussion or interacting with their teacher or peer group in class. That said, the discourses we use in higher education do not necessarily suggest that students need to conform to the practices of the dominant culture, as Trahar (2008, p. 11) asserted that some interactive pedagogies may provide a space for both students and staff to include critical reflections on their own and others' backgrounds. This collaborative approach may make it clear to students that their sociocultural contexts may be relevant and indeed crucial to the curriculum they are studying. As such, we should not just see diversity as a positive aspect of education, but move towards exploring diversity as part of the 'lived experience' of teaching and learning in a particular context.

### 5.2 Students' Intercultural Communication Experiences inside the Classroom

According to Byram (1997), the most significant locations conducive to acquiring intercultural competence are: the classroom, the pedagogically structured experience outside the classroom, and the independent experience. As such, this section illustrates the extent to which the multicultural classroom setting promoted or, in some cases, hindered the participants' development of linguistic competence, and intercultural knowledge and skills (factors in Byram's ICC model).

#### 5.2.1 Classroom language practice

For most of the international participants, the classroom setting, which included a mixture of foreign students from diverse cultural backgrounds, appeared conducive to promoting their



Chinese language skills, as the medium of communication was mainly Chinese. As Steve remarked:

*In class we are only allowed to speak Chinese so the class setting is very helpful. Every class has 2 hours of purely speaking Chinese with classmates, so my oral Chinese class has five Americans, four Japanese students, three Korean students, and some kids from Europe, so it's a good mix. Since we all speak different languages, our common language is Chinese. (Steve)*

Steve's view was widely endorsed by the other participants and they gave various examples from their experiences to illustrate how the classroom environment, and, in particular, language practices within it, fostered their linguistic competence. Christina explained:

*My classroom structure is very geared towards helping us practise in class. So, for speaking class, there is a lot of communication with your table buddy. There is not a Chinese person in our class; our class has Americans, has some from Europe, and from Netherlands, so there is a lot of dialogue in class, whether it is reading the text, or using the sentence structures or the vocabularies to create a story of your own. So those exercises are very good for helping us improve our speaking skills. (Christina)*

Thus, participants attributed their improving linguistic competence partly to the multicultural classroom setting, and more importantly, the structured communicative practice among students from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, there appear to be contradictory viewpoints regarding the structure of the new learning environment. Contrasting the teaching styles back in the UK with those in China, Michelle critically expressed her concern over the application of knowledge to real life conversation, because the way she was used to learning in the UK was more geared towards cultivating students' communicative competence and self-directed learning skills:

*It's still different styles of teaching to what we were used to in Oxford, so it's quite difficult to get used to that. At Oxford last year, we had role play, and they were actually really useful, like, you try to book a hotel, or to order some food in a restaurant, such day-to-day stuff, and they just gave us a lot of role-plays to do, such as giving directions. Whereas, like, here you learn one example, and then they don't really explain how that's used, so then you could only use it in that one example, so that you can't use it in real life because it has to be in that specific situation, and also because you haven't understood it properly, you can't use it in application. (Michelle)*

Michelle's comment echoes the participants' other critical perceptions of the one-way transmission of knowledge, their attitudes towards textbook knowledge, and their appreciation of critical thinking discussed earlier in this chapter. In fact, the 'learn by using' approach promoted in the Western classroom (as suggested by Michelle from her Oxford experience) in

which communicative language teaching was celebrated appeared not to fit with the traditional Chinese 'learn to use' philosophy, because the focus of this philosophy is not on how teachers and students can create, construct, and apply knowledge in an experiential approach, but rather on how extant authoritative knowledge can be transmitted and internalised in the most effective and efficient way (Brick, 1991; Jin & Cortazzi, 1995). In this regard, Michelle further explained the reason underpinning her inclination towards the CLT approach, when she said that the way knowledge was rigidly imparted in class was *'not as memorable as when you are actually in an environment where you were talking to someone, and you have your real interest in conversation'*. Michelle's reflection accords with the findings of Hammond and Gao's (2002) study. They argue that in Western classrooms, knowledge is constructed through student-student and teacher-student communication which they described as a dialogic learning model, that is, a holistic, interactive, cooperative, and diversified approach to learning that emphasises critical thinking, and real-time evaluation. The dialogic model, therefore, contrasts strongly with the dialectic model in which knowledge is passively absorbed by students and where the practices and communication styles are largely direct and explicit.

#### 5.2.2 Integrating with home students

The mutual contact between local and international students is regularly noted as an important factor in achieving the aforementioned aims of internationalisation. In fact, the need to mix with Chinese speakers as a way of gaining exposure to Chinese was paramount for most of the international participants in this study. However, there is much evidence from the participants' accounts to suggest that, despite the increasingly multicultural nature of university campuses, the most typical pattern is one of minimal interaction between home and international students, and which applies to scenarios both inside and outside the classroom. According to Marilyn, the composition of the student body in lessons, which consisted only of overseas students, deprived them of the opportunities to approach native speakers in class, and as a result, restrained international students from enhancing their linguistic competence:

*But in terms of interacting with Chinese people I don't think these courses are helpful, because you start classes with other foreign students, and the only people you are talking to, other than your professor, are not native Chinese students, so you are practising not fluent Chinese with other not fluent Chinese speakers. (Marilyn)*

Marilyn's point of view regarding the lack of integration with home students was widely shared by other participants. Quite a number of them began to show doubt about the class composition and gave high credit to engaging with Chinese speakers in class:

*But now I am not studying with Chinese students, and apart from that, the other international students in my classes, they don't speak fluent Chinese as I do, so I just don't like this kind of environment now, because it's not good for me to study Chinese. (Kaho)*

*I don't think it is appropriate to learn Chinese in our department, because all the 16 students in my class are from countries all over the world, and their Chinese proficiency is quite similar to mine, so it's difficult for me to get improvement in my Chinese. (Matthew)*

The above accounts illustrate that the international participants appeared to be persistently searching for ways of improving their Chinese. Their desire for relationships with home students seems to be part of this aim. To this end, they prioritised engagement with Chinese-speaking students as a way of improving their language skills, as they see the class composition as the major barrier to their development of linguistic competence. Such a finding coincides with reflections from Montgomery's (2010, p. 101) study, which revealed that for most sojourners the most effective way to learn a language is to live in that country and mix with its people. In addition, the current situation also seemed to be at odds with principles underpinning the 'internationalisation at home' policy, as its core concern was directed at the vast majority of home students, especially as regards creating an intercultural environment where positive cross-cultural contacts could occur. As a consequence, the international classroom plays an increasingly significant role as the main site in which such processes could take place (Leask, 2007). As I remarked at the outset, according to Byram (1997, p. 66), the classroom is also assumed to be the place where learners can gain knowledge of the processes of intercultural communication. However, this study indicates that this assumption appears not to be realised at University X. The participants' appreciation of a dialogic learning model was constrained not only by what they perceived to be the more dialectic teaching style of the teachers, but also by the absence of Chinese students in their foreign language class. Thus, the academic and social value of intercultural communication between home and international students inside the classroom was not realised here, resulting in the international students feeling that they were not sufficiently developing their linguistic competence.

### 5.2.3 Improving intercultural knowledge

In the new learning environment, the students became the main actors and the interaction among the students themselves was the medium of gaining knowledge. It has been argued that the foremost location where the acquisition of intercultural competence might occur is the classroom, as traditionally that is the place where cultural learning and the acquisition of knowledge about another country and culture (Byram, 1997, p. 65) has taken place. In this

respect, most of the participants in the present study came to agree that the language programme, and the pedagogical approach in particular in the new learning environment, exerted a significant effect on their understanding of and improvement in their knowledge of Chinese culture, as exemplified in the following extracts:

*I think the way that I learned the most about Chinese culture is from whatever I have learned in class, what the lecturer taught us, that's the first one. (Lauren)*

*Along with learning the language and its grammar, our teachers also try to teach us more about different aspects of culture; it helps to integrate learning the language with learning aspects of Chinese culture, so I think my language programme helps me a little bit. (Steve)*

This finding provides evidence to support Byram's argument on the advantage of the foreign language classroom, which was deemed as "the space for systematic and structured presentation of knowledge in prolongation of the better traditions of language teaching" (p. 65). In addition, the classroom can also offer the opportunity for the acquisition of skills under the guidance of a teacher. Being surrounded by different cultures, most of the participants manifested a heightened cultural awareness and understanding, as exemplified by George:

*More often in my class, the teacher will ask a question, and then everyone will talk about it. So, for example, I remember we have talked about marriage in class at one point, and the teacher will say in China, the expectation is still the woman would get married quite young, and she will say, what about in your country, so the Japanese person may say in Japan, it is like this, and the American might say in my country actually it's like this, and then in Europe, like the Italians, they will say in Europe I think... from those conversations in class, you often learn things about other cultures. And then sometimes, they will say things that really surprise you. (George)*

Like George, some students attributed their gaining of intercultural knowledge to classroom activities such as group discussion which, in turn, helped international students to establish bonds among themselves:

*There was one chapter last term that was about where your name comes from and why people are named about their names. So, a lot of the things we have discussed in class was how did your culture choose names. So not just concerning about Chinese, but also the way Japanese people choose names and the way whoever, like French people choose names as well, so it's good like that. Usually it's able to facilitate the discussion, which allows you to explain your culture while learning about other people's cultures, and what Chinese culture is. (Olivia)*

It is evident from the above accounts that the pedagogical strategies in the current teaching

contexts were not confined to enhancing international students' acquisition of Chinese culture. More importantly, the multicultural classroom setting acted as the platform where students can share their cultural values and exchange their beliefs and identities in a more structured and comparative way. As Byram (1997, p. 66) argued, the knowledge of relationships, especially relationships between cultures, should be one significant feature that is embedded in classroom teaching, an approach which implies a comparative method (as illustrated by the participants' comments here). The advantage of placing relationships at the focus of knowledge teaching is that they are more easily linked to communication and the acquisition of language. As a result, the international students who participated in the present study showed improvement in their skills of discovery, which Byram defined as the skill of building up specific knowledge as well as an understanding of the beliefs, meanings, and behaviours which are inherent in particular phenomena, whether documents or interactions (Byram, 1997, p. 38).

#### 5.2.4 Summary

A key finding that emerged from the study was that in the formation of the 'internationalised classroom', academic staff are key members of the academic community. They will not only shape the internationalised curriculum, but will also be influential in shaping how their students perceive the international and global dimension of their learning. The data from the participants' experiences revealed that this transformation of students' perception entails proactive management of the discussion and groupwork component, with the major purpose of reinforcing mutual interaction. In this regard, the pedagogical strategies implemented in the multicultural classroom did not sufficiently support the development of the students' linguistic competence; however, their intercultural knowledge and skills of discovering and interacting were developed to some extent for most of the international participants in this study in that way.

However, the picture is a complicated one. On the one hand, the participants embrace and appreciate the value of classroom diversity and take intercultural relations in the classroom as a source of knowledge and mutual enrichment between culturally diverse learners. On the other hand, however, there appears to be ongoing dissatisfaction for international students with their lack of integration with local students, as they believed that integrating and maximising communication with local Chinese students in the classroom setting is a most effective way of improving language competence.

### 5.3 Students' intercultural communication experience with the institutional system outside the classroom

The aim of this section is to understand the intercultural communication experience of the international sample of students with University X's institutional interventions and activities. Their thoughts and concerns are addressed in relation to the corresponding internationalisation policy discussed in chapter 4, and the practical implications for intercultural dialogue are considered.

As Jackson (2012, p. 458) suggests, programmes seeking to build in experiential activities that require sustained intercultural contact and relationships with people who have been socialised in a different cultural environment may enable sojourners to apply their intercultural communication skills and to develop knowledge and local sociopragmatic norms, provided there is sufficient scaffolding and ongoing support. Such programmes may also help newcomers to develop a sense of belonging in the host environment, thereby facilitating both language and intercultural learning and adjustment.

In accordance with the policy initiatives of implementing extracurricular activities outside the classroom (discussed in chapter 4) to reinforce international students' engagement with the host institution, on the one hand, and to integrate with home students on the other, this section presents first the major issues that international students encountered when seeking engagement with the host institution, and, secondly, their experience of the institutional (intercultural) activities with regard to promoting integration with home students.

#### 5.3.1 Getting access to activities

Corresponding to Bergan and Restoueix' (2009) proposed strategies to promote intercultural dialogue as discussed in chapter 2, the data in this study also showed that when seeking to integrate into the host institution, overseas students faced two issues, namely a perceived language barrier, and a lack of inclusiveness in the host community.

##### ***The language barrier***

Language competence can be a major factor that inhibits intercultural communication and interpersonal relationship building, as has been demonstrated by numerous empirical studies (e.g., Brewer, 1997; Chen, 1998; Gao & Prime, 2010). This claim is also evidenced by the

present study. The data analysis shows that language inadequacy in Chinese emerged as one of the main obstacles that prevented the international students from participating in activities outside the classroom. The students constantly found that the information, be it online or in print, used to advertise extracurricular activities was mostly in Chinese. In the two episodes below Matthew and Michelle illustrate how their language inadequacies intensified the difficulty they had over joining intercultural activities:

*I think there are a lot of opportunities for me to interact with Chinese students, but the biggest barrier is the language. I see a lot of texts about Pingpong group organised by postgraduates from the Department of Economics, they are all in Chinese, and I didn't know where to go to join them. (Matthew)*

*I think again it's mainly the language barrier, because they have a website with all the columns served in Chinese, so it's quite difficult to navigate the way around it. (Michelle)*

To overcome this problem, Michelle suggested that 'the societies [needed] to be more international minded' and to 'have the English version along with the Chinese version on their website'. In fact, the dilemma Michelle confronted resonated with other participants, who also tended to attribute the challenge of integrating into Chinese clubs and societies to their language deficiency:

*I can't debate by taking some examples, because of the language problem. I really don't know many foreigners at all who are involved in societies where there are also Chinese people. (Struan)*

It seemed that from Struan's point of view, the lack of language proficiency impinged on foreign students' ability to join societies organised by their Chinese counterparts. He further highlighted the pivotal role that language played in furthering international students' affinity with the host community and, at the same time, minimising their feelings of alienation:

*I think improving language makes it easier, if you can say more to people around you, you feel more at home; if you can't speak to anyone, you feel by yourself, and you are not relaxed. (Struan)*

These accounts reinforce Fantini's (2012) assertion that mastery of the target language facilitates one's entry into and adaptation to the host culture. However, given the fact that the 'psychological climate' on campus, which Bergan and Restoueix (2009) saw as an institutional strategic choice and a promotion of initiatives to genuinely integrate foreign students into everyday academic life, was perceived as militating against involving international students and

subsequently triggered feelings of isolation. This topic relates to the notion of having a 'sense of belonging' which is discussed next.

### ***The role of institutions in involving foreign students***

According to Kim (2012), individuals who perceive the receiving environment as welcoming, hospitable, and tolerant are more likely to show positive engagement and integration with the host culture. However, as described above and further developed here, international students aspired to more engagement with the host institution, and at times felt alienated and lost track of updated information that was necessary for joining institution-led clubs and associations:

*Besides the class, because they don't have student clubs that you can join, it's quite difficult to find out how to join them, since nobody told me, I don't know how to find out. (Lauren)*

*I was hoping there would be more to involve us with other Chinese students, but there wasn't. Even if there was, I didn't hear about them, they are not very good at publicising events. (Olivia)*

In effect, Lauren and Olivia's experience was not unique. Some international participants attributed the difficulty in becoming involved with Chinese students to 'segregation', a perception which was, in itself, triggered by the attitudes and behaviour of home students who ran the campus clubs and societies:

*In terms of advertising and handing out flyers, they see you are white, maybe they just ignore you, sometimes they probably ask but it's nice to be given the option, like to be included as the Chinese are. (Michelle)*

Here Michelle demonstrated one of the major intercultural adjustment challenges that most of the international students confronted when attempting to become involved with the host context. They lacked of 'a sense of belonging'. As evidenced by earlier studies, a sense of belonging is developed through a form of student engagement which constitutes far more than mere participation and instead involves some measure of emotional commitment and investment (Hoffman, Perillo, Hawthorne Calizo, Hadfield, & Lee, 2005). This form of engagement is not based upon programming and publicity, but rather on a holistic student experience that fosters student engagement. This point was also captured by one of their Chinese counterparts, Du. She ascribed the foreign students' lack of involvement in extracurricular activities to the 'taken-for-granted' attitude of those who were in charge of campus societies:



感觉这些活动外国学生参加得挺少的，感觉不太适合他们。比如说首先有的标题可能不太明确，可能他们在设计的时候就没有考虑要让外国人来参加，他们用了很多现代的流行词，外国人可能不会懂，但是对于中国人来说很吸引人。（杜）

*I just felt that not a lot of foreign students would like to participate in those societies, which was attributed mainly to their fitness to the students' interest. For instance, the title of some activities was quite obscure, maybe they didn't take involving foreign students into account when organising activities, since most of the words used in the title were quite popular, which seemed difficult for foreign students to understand, but rather appealed to Chinese people. (Du)*

It can be seen from the above accounts that the perceived lack of inclusiveness from the host institution seemed at odds with theories of intercultural responsibility that foreground “a psychological readiness to be empathetic and to control one's emotions, that is, to be patient and tolerant towards the other” (Guilherme, 2010, p. 8). The degree of power distance perceived by the international students may run the risk of reinforcing their negative perceptions of the host nationals. In this regard, the reflection from Struan highlighted the commitment that needed to be taken by both foreign students themselves and the institution:

*Just telling people who run the societies to try to get Westerners involved. I wouldn't say that's the only way to do it, because if we really try a lot harder, we probably could get involved. So, it's partly a lack of effort on our part, and then I think partly a lack of willingness and motivation to have us, because I am sure they will agree as more efforts to have foreigners, because they don't speak the same language, you don't have as much in common with them. So, I can understand why foreigners have to try harder, put in effort to get involved, and then Chinese societies may need to be more accepting, or be encouraged to take more Westerners. (Struan)*

From Struan's point of view, reinforcing foreign students' engagement with the community entails the dual effort on the part of both themselves and the student organisations run by the host university. In this sense, this finding resonates with the discussion in chapter 2, in that it reiterates the idea that mere exposure to another cultural environment or being present in a multicultural community does not guarantee that intercultural communication will take place; indeed, such exposure may even reinforce language learners' stereotypes and prejudices (Coleman, 1997, 1998). Therefore, importance was attached to the cultural inclusiveness of the educational environment, which, according to McLoughlin (2011), not only entails the recognition and valuing of cultural diversity, but also at the same time enables the world views of all students to be expressed through teaching and learning, thus contributing to increased acceptance and interactions among students from diverse cultures (Thompson & Byrnes, 2011).

### 5.3.2 Activities that foster intercultural understanding and communication

Conforming to previous study that aimed to examine the effects of informal learning, for instance, motives towards mentoring schemes, and increased use of classroom assistance and buddies in schools (Hodkinson, Colley, & Malcolm, 2003), the international students' experience in this study also showed positive attitudes towards institutional activities such as the language partner programmes. However, their responses vary with respect to the effects of these activities on their social and learning experience. A recurring theme that centres on the participants' experience of the institutional activities is the relationships and strong social networks they develop outside the classroom; these informal interactions appeared to provide added value to their learning in the formal classroom, and may have played a part in enabling students to continue and to succeed in their studies at University X. Bearing this in mind, the discussion in this section will concentrate on five specific extracurricular activities, in order to identify the extent to which they have either hindered or enhanced students' intercultural understanding and communication.

#### *The language partner programme*

Quantitatively speaking, the first and most frequently mentioned institutional activity that the participants referred to was the language partner programme advocated and practised across the campus. The interview accounts show that most participants took such programmes to be an effective way of practising and improving Chinese, on the one hand, and becoming acquainted with the customs and life styles of Chinese people, on the other:

*I think the language partner programme is very useful, because you can practise your Chinese, or they can help you if you have questions about your homework, you can ask questions. (Hannah)*

*Through conversations and meeting my language buddies, I am able to learn more about the life style, their own habits and customs, how they go about their lives, why they study, what they are studying, for the future, like one of my language buddies, she is getting a PhD in Biomedical Engineering because she wants a good job. It's not something you can learn in the textbook. (Christina)*

The student experience examined here concurs with Clifford's (2009) study in suggesting that one of the keys to improving intercultural interaction and international experiences in higher education is the link between social or informal learning and the more formal learning associated with the curriculum and classroom, and which is underlined by recent work on the necessity of acknowledging learning beyond the formal curriculum. As both parties are verbally

involved in such programmes, one of their outstanding benefits is the 'win-win' effect they have on both international and home students alike. In Olivia's opinion, the language partners programme at University X considerably enhanced her own linguistic competence, and also the English proficiency of her language partner:

*Usually when we meet up she speaks in English and I speak in Chinese. So, when she makes mistakes I will correct her, or when she doesn't know how to say something, she will ask me in Chinese, I will tell her in English. And the same to me when I speak to her in Chinese, if I don't know how to say something she will correct me, or she will tell me how to find a better way to say it. So that has been very useful. (Olivia)*

What is worth noting here is that this programme seemed to contribute to minimising the gulf between the 'internationalisation at home' policy and the actual interactive experience between the home and international students, as was identified in previous sections. However, for some international participants, the language partner programme was beneficial because it allowed students to identify and explore common interests and to create meaningful interaction between the two groups. However, language partners were not always compatible, as, for example, Olivia depicted her meeting with a previous language partner as 'awkward'. This awkwardness led her to decide not to meet up again. In fact, Olivia's feeling was not uncommon among the international participants, who explicitly addressed the importance they attached to mutual understanding and respect:

*The university just let us go out to meet and chat, they don't check how we are getting on. And maybe they can try and... I don't know if it is that important, but they can try and match interests, I am lucky that my language partner and I both are very interested in politics, current things and news like that, but if he wasn't interested in that, I don't really know what we would talk about. (Struan)*

*Some people don't really learn that way, I know a lot of people who don't really do themselves, they sit down, they don't really ask questions from my opinion, that's fine, but that's probably not beneficial, because you can't know each other. (Michelle)*

Michelle's account can also be linked with an underdeveloped concept: intercultural responsibility. This refers to "a conscious and reciprocally respectful, both professional and personal, relationship among the team/group members" (Guilherme, Keating, & Hoppe, 2010, p. 79). As this definition implies, every member needs to recognise not only cultural differences and similarities, but also to develop full and reciprocally demanding professional relationships with members from other cultures (2010). Thus, intercultural responsibility goes beyond the

notion of intercultural competence, and adds a moral and ethical element (2010). Therefore, I argue that intercultural responsibility should be included as a component of intercultural competence because it emphasises the cooperative nature of multicultural interactions. In this sense, intercultural responsibility could be seen as contributing to a higher level of interpersonal relationship.

### ***The International Cultural Festival***

In addition to the language partner programme, the international participants reported on the effects of the International Cultural Festival, which was recognised as the first-hand experience of otherness. According to participants, the International Cultural Festival provided a platform for hundreds of students to take part and share their cultures and traditions, by, for example, daring one another to taste food and join in the singing and dancing. The festival was highly appreciated by both international and Chinese students:

*When I first arrived at China, I think the most helpful activity was the International Cultural Festival, which acquainted me with not only other Russian students, but also students from a diversity of countries. (Dasha)*

我觉得文化节做得比较好的地方就是让他们当他们本国人来办，然后确是把他们本国最有代表性的文化拿出来展示给大家看。对于了解各个国家的文化还是挺有帮助的，比如只要他们往那一站，你就会知道哪个国家都长什么样。（莫）

*As far as I can see, the best part of the International Cultural Festival lies in its manifestation of the most representative culture of each country, as it was organised entirely by the native students, who played a pivotal role on helping others understand their culture. (Mo)*

Obviously, this event contributed to increased exposure between home and international students. However, the participants remained doubtful about whether it would lead to real integration and internationalisation. Fun as it may be, some were sceptical about its merely focusing on superficial manifestations of culture, and that, like other forms of multiculturalism, its failure to address the continuing power differences in the area of cultural authority:

我们有一个文化节，但是那个很短，就一天，会有各个国家的人每个国家有一个展位，展示自己国家的有意思的东西啊，或者也可以做自己国家的美食，那个活动很大，但是因为它是一个展览性质的，所以你就是走一圈，各个国家都看一看，并没有特别深的交流。（李）

*The International Cultural Festival lasts for only 1 day. Each country had its own booth to show foods, clothes or other things that may symbolise their own country. However, since the festival was in itself an exhibition, which means*

*you could merely catch a glimpse of the booth of each country, except for that, you might not even get a chance to have an intense conversation with students from other countries. (Li)*

Li's point of view was widely shared by other Chinese participants, quite a number of whom began to show doubt about the effectiveness of the International Cultural Festival as a way of reinforcing their intercultural knowledge, as well as promoting communication with international students. For example, Fan said the exhibition only 'skims the surface' of each country's representative culture, and was far from enough for one to gain an in-depth impression. This finding lends support to Harrison's (2007) claim that internationalised university experiences cannot be easily met by simply increasing casual exposure between home and international students. Rather, the tasks and activities that require students to engage in intercultural interaction should have meaning and authenticity in the students' personal and academic contexts (Montgomery, 2010, p. 132).

### ***The speech contest***

In addition to the language partner programme and the International Cultural Festival, the participants also spoke highly of the speech contest, in terms of its ability to proliferate communication between international students from the same class, who might otherwise be prone to alienation from each other:

*Before the contest, we didn't really contact with each other, not a lot in class, we were a bit shy, but during the rehearsal, it was really nice and it was really fun, so I think that was really helpful to understand other people in my class, just by communicating with them and having fun with them, I really like that. (Hannah)*

*So, the good thing about the speech contest is that because everybody has to participate, you end up working with the Japanese students and the Korean students, who you might otherwise not necessarily spend time with or socialise with. Because when you spend more time with people from different cultures you observe them and you see they laugh at this, but they don't laugh at that; they behave like this, but they don't behave like that. I think from that, just from what you see, and what you hear, that helps you understand more about their culture. (George)*

Given the fact that conational networks provide a comfortable zone for sojourners studying in a new learning context, most participants admitted the benefits and help they received from associating with conationals. Nevertheless, they considered this in-group tendency to be a barrier to extending relationship networks to other ethnic groups. That finding resonates with Thom's (2009) study which explored the perceived value that its participants gave to 'getting out of their own cultural groups', which he claimed was the forerunner that led to learning new

ways of interacting, performing better, and seeing value in learning from each other. The participants' accounts also concur with Volet and Ang's (1998) study by indicating that people's perceptions of each other and the 'other' can be dispelled through active experience of working together and coming to know individuals as real people. The data also indicate that moving beyond the cultural confinement of their 'in-group' helped the participants' development of the skills of interpreting and discovering, which, according to Byram (1997), are essential to resolve intercultural conflicts especially when they are seemingly irreconcilable. Likewise, the accounts above resonate with some of the home students' appraisal of the speech contest, particularly with respect to the important role it played not only in promoting international students' participation, but also in enhancing their understanding of Chinese culture:

他们的表演都挺有意思的，因为他们是以班为单位表演节目，平常不活泼的人也被带动了。他们就是表演的都是跟中国人有关的东西，很多都是模仿中国人一些说话的语气啊，比如儿化音啊，然后就是讲一些中国的现象，更多的是和中国相关的。（刘）

*I was so impressed by their performance, which correlated strongly with customs and rituals of Chinese people, as most of their performance was to imitate the tone of voice of locals, or to show the status quo of Chinese society. Everybody was quite involved in such activity, even those who were introverted and less likely to approach others in class. (Liu)*

It can be seen from the above accounts that, in comparison to the International Cultural Festival, both the international and Chinese participants gave added value to the speech contest for its role in stimulating their initiatives to interact with cultural others rather than to stick with conationals. Liu's reflection in particular highlighted the practical significance of the speech contest as a way of reinforcing sojourner students' social skills, skills that were necessary for daily communication, routine activities, and being accepted by the host culture. In this regard, the findings above provide evidence to support Bergan and Restoueix's (2009) claim that carefully planned interventions are necessary to encourage meaningful interaction between different cultural groups to help break down barriers not only in the classroom, but also in other areas of the students' lives.

### ***Activities beyond the campus***

As already discussed in chapter 4, as part of its orientation programme, the Office of International Relations based at University X is responsible for organising various activities outside the university for all its newly recruited international students. Orientation aims to help students to familiarise themselves with the local culture and to adapt better to campus life. The

orientation programme includes activities such as attending public lectures on Chinese laws and regulations and visiting scenic spots and historical sites in this large city in China. The participants' accounts supported this policy and gave especial credit to the value that off-campus intercultural communication experience could engender in enriching their intercultural knowledge and communication skills. According to Steve, the field trip that was part of the language partner programme initially played a pivotal role in improving his Chinese competence, and pedagogically speaking, it also served as a complement to what he had learned in the traditional language classroom:

*Another aspect of the (language partner) programme is that we have field trips; usually it's in small groups. So, it included my Chinese language partner, another American student and me, and we would go to somewhere in such a large city in China. Because the whole time we were encouraged to speak Chinese and also learned about the thing you were doing, so I think that's extremely helpful, because obviously I was trying to enjoy the thing that I was visiting, but also I had to try to think about it in Chinese rather than just English. It's like incorporating everything I have learned, so I think that's definitely very helpful. (Steve)*

This off-campus field trip can be compared to what Byram (1997) termed pedagogically structured experience outside the classroom. According to Byram, compared to the classroom setting, fieldwork clearly allows for the development of the learners' autonomy and a range of important skills, particularly the skills of interaction, in real time within a structured and framed experience of otherness. At the same time this type of experience promotes their discovery and interpretation of new data which learners continually add to the knowledge base provided in classroom learning. Experiences that engage individuals with unfamiliar conventions of behaviour and interaction and which affect all five senses challenge learners in ways that the classroom can seldom replicate (pp. 68-69). For overseas students who had little incentive to approach the local community, off-campus travelling activities acted as a means to expose students to the cultural configuration of the host country:

*Because when travelling you get to interact more with people as well, and obviously you visit a lot of historical sites, so you learned a lot about it. They (the staff in the Office of International Relations) took us to Sichuan and Hangzhou; they also took us to the Great Wall, and they did try and help integrate (us) with the culture, which was really nice actually. (Michelle)*

It was apparent that, on the whole, the international participants made positive comments on extensive exposure to the local community which might enable them to extend their perspectives to see the host community as a whole. The above accounts regarding international participants' positive attitudes towards off-campus travelling experience also echo the findings

of previous studies to show that, in terms of the development of intercultural competencies in particular, interventions, such as experiential learning and opportunities to engage with host nationals (Paige & Goode, 2009; Vande Berg, 2007) that are provided during students' study abroad periods, prove to be productive.

### **The Western Students Union**

The participants' interview accounts revealed that the Western Students Union was considered the second most popular activity, after the language partner programme, that foreign students were keen to take part in, as it is essentially a Westernised organisation that facilitates communication between students from diverse ethnic groups. As Christina mentioned:

*The Westerns Student Union has people from all over the place, from, like, South Africa, or European countries, Mexico. At the university there are the Western Students Union, Malaysia Students Union, Korean Students Union, all these different unions, but the Western Students Union is very active; they include people from all over the place. So, by being part of that group, you are introduced to people from all over the place, and you get to know them, and the different cultures they come from. (Christina)*

As the above account indicates, the Western Students Union complemented the language partner programme in that its composition accommodates a variety of cultural groups. It is not, however, as rigid as the language partner programme where both Chinese and foreign students had to stick to an 'one-hour Chinese vs. one-hour English' mode of communication. The Western Students Union's strengths lie in its receptiveness to new perspectives and worldviews, and its respect for difference. Olivia's summary was typical of most participants' comments on their appreciation of the Western Students Union:

*The Western Students Union has been really good for meeting with other foreigners, because we did a Great Wall trip, like, an over-night camping trip on the Great Wall. They organised bar crowds and pizza nights, and all kinds of topics. I have learnt something about their [Chinese] traditions, about their view on things, like why they think differently to me, and why they have different political views to me. And sometimes we talked about the Chinese culture, and also about Chinese politics. (Olivia)*

Obviously, intensive exposure to diverse viewpoints and perspectives provided space for the international participants to renegotiate their personal and cultural self in intercultural settings, which, according to Byram (1997), promoted the development of their skills of discovery and interaction. However, when it comes to the integration of Chinese students, the participants expressed their concern over the Union's appeal to Chinese students:



*I am in the Western Students Union. All the students are from Western countries. They just have organised pizza night[s] or trip[s] to the Great Wall. So that's really good for meeting people, but not so much for meeting Chinese people. (Olivia)*

*There are opportunities, but the big Western students' association groups or they don't accommodate Chinese students, and most of the activities organised by the association are about going to the pubs or having [a] pizza party, rarely were Chinese students interested in these. (Matthew)*

In summary, even though positive value was ascribed to the role that the Western Students Union played in integrating students from diverse cultural backgrounds, the way it was run appeared to be at odds with the socialisation practices of Chinese culture. As a result, the students did not see that the Western Students Union was helpful as a channel through which the international students could form relationships with host students.

### 5.3.3 Summary

To conclude, the findings in this subsection show that the participants' engagement in intercultural contact and experience provides them with opportunities to see how cultural others behave and think and thereby enrich their perspectives. When students mixed in a shared activity their perceptions of one another became more positive, although, given the choice, they would still prefer to complete work in a group of students from similar cultural backgrounds.

The participants' reflection on their sense of belonging resonates with findings of previous studies showing that a significant factor associated with student persistence is the level of engagement of students with their college or university community outside of classes (Peltier et. al., 1999). Organised programmes are less effective than opportunities for active involvement such as research projects, service learning opportunities, and campus clubs and organisations (McKinney, Medvedeva, Vacca, & Malak, 2004). Participants tended to give more credit to their engagement with off-campus travel activities and the Western Students Union which enabled them to gain new perspectives and intercultural knowledge, and more importantly, to boost the development of their skills of discovery and interaction. The findings in this section of my thesis also provide evidence that supports Crosbie's (2014) claim that there is a need to critique the demand-led curriculum that underlies contemporary higher education. According to Crosbie (2014), importance needs to be attached not only to physical but also to cognitive and affective commitment in the activity, that is, to engage with the heart and senses.

## 5.4 Experience of the university administration system

According to Bergan and Restoueix (2009, p. 36), the efforts of universities to foster intercultural dialogue essentially focus on two major areas: the support that the university administration gives students with: a) the practical problems they encounter i.e., information, accommodation, study guidance, the various permits they may need, and pastoral care, if necessary; and, b) linguistic support through either courses in the host country's language or measures to facilitate students' adjustments to the new teaching methods. However, they argue that these measures do not necessarily guarantee the development of a consistent and high-quality intercultural dialogue. Analysis of the data in the present study shows that the inherent features of cultural diversity also play a significant part in this multicultural climate and, therefore, in fostering intercultural dialogue on campus—from the attitude of the administration, which may range from bureaucratic to helpful, to the promotion of initiatives such as social events and get-togethers by groups (such as student clubs) and individuals—with the aim of genuinely integrating minority groups into everyday academic life. In this regard, the discussion in this section will focus on the international participants' perception of the residential arrangements, the management skills of the university's administration, and the extent to which faculty staff and administrators are able to cater to the needs of foreign students outside the classroom.

#### 5.4.1 Residential arrangements

In chapter 4, I pointed out that insufficient emphasis was put upon promoting international students' integration into and interaction with the residential community in the Chinese higher education arena. In fact, the international participants were agreed that their expectation to expand intercultural relations with home students was hardly taken into account in the institution's educational practice. This lack of integration was perceived by the informants in a range of ways. and the residential arrangement was conceived of as one of the major barriers that stopped students from fulfilling their expectations of expanding their social circles with home students outside of the classroom. As Kaho and Marilyn remarked:

*Because I am living in the Global Village, where there are also no Chinese people, I also don't think that is good for me to improve my Chinese. I mean I can communicate with other international students, which also helps me broaden my horizons. But most of the students living in the Global Village share their room with other international students, not Chinese people. (Kaho)*

*To be honest I don't think our university does a very good job in terms of integrating the international and Chinese students. For example, the structure of the school, why do they put all the international students on dorms that are*

*across the street opposite the campus, separated from the Chinese students? I don't know why they do that. I am not saying that I don't like it, but I am questioning why they structured it that way if they are trying to integrate the international students. (Marilyn)*

Such a finding is consistent with those of recent studies that also found that international students are often disappointed by the lack of opportunity to engage with home students. However, creating opportunities that promote intercultural relationships remains an intractable challenge (Thom, 2010, p. 155). Most participants wanted to be able to integrate with local students as they saw such integration as indispensable in actualising the goal of practising Chinese in the residential community.

*I think the Global Village is very nice, but I personally think that it would be the best if they could integrate foreign students with Chinese students. I think if I had a Chinese roommate who I could speak Chinese to every day, I think that would be amazing. When I came here and found out that I would be living with only international students I was kind of upset. I was hoping that I would be with other Chinese students in University X, I just thought that would be great, especially if that student was trying to learn English, then we can just help each other every day. So, I think that would be ideal, the best scenario. (Steve)*

The above account appears to provide evidence that supports Byram's argument that the development of intercultural knowledge and skills, especially skills of discovery and interaction, presupposes personal contact (1997, p. 67). Though not all the participants found it that easy to interact with cultural others, they believed that interacting involved generic skills, and that these skills should be in everybody's repertoire for effective intercultural communication, which, as evidenced in earlier sections, is taken as an essential avenue of learning. However, being physically separated, to some extent, gave rise to a lack of a 'sense of belonging' for some of the international participants:

*I don't feel like we are students of University X, I never feel, like, part of University X in the same way as we are in Oxford, I don't know, I expected more...to feel more like part of the university, where in the university to integrate with the people, and the most interaction with the university is through teachers or through getting food. Because we couldn't live in campus, they separate the undergraduates with the international and visiting students in two different areas, so all the international students live in the Global Village, which is opposite the university, there is, like, the segregation, so I don't think that helps with the integration. (Michelle)*

The above comments drew attention to a perceived barrier that is institutionally built between international and Chinese students by the residential policy of the university. This separation has most likely purposefully come about in order to facilitate communication between the

university and its students, and in order to address particular needs of different students, as the data from my research suggest. However, many of the students who are housed in the Global Village by the university do not feel that the international services apply to them, and so perhaps this system for student categorisation may not be the most productive.

#### 5.4.2 Management skills

To date, research on students' intercultural and international experiences has focused predominantly on their linguistic and sociocultural issues. One critical issue that has rarely been touched upon is university students' attitude towards the management skills of those in the administration system, especially the crucial role that faculty staff and administrators are supposed to take on in building personal relationships with international students and managing their academic progress. There was a range of different opinions among the international participants in relation to what should be offered in terms of support for mobile students. A recurring theme relates to the capability of the institution administrators to understand the difficulties that international students are confronted with in adapting to the norms and interactive patterns of the new culture, and, therefore, to offer appropriate assistance in line with students' needs.

*There are so many questions, and sometimes they don't know the answer, so they tell us to go to this person, and that person over there, it's a hard mess, no one knows anything. (Christina)*

Another similar case in this respect was Marilyn, who appeared to be aware of the different value frames between Chinese and her own culture concerning the management of students' affairs:

*I don't think they are helpful at all. If you go to them to ask a question, they don't know the answer, and usually they ask you to go to someone else, and you go to that person and sometimes they don't know how to help you, and sometimes they are not even there doing their office hours. Sometimes they are in a meeting, then I asked 'when they will be back from their meeting?', someone said I don't know. (So, you have to keep trying). No one knows anything, that's what I feel like. I don't know what they are doing, but in America if you go to someone at the administration, they are very good, but here they don't really know, no one really knows anything. If they are in a meeting, they may tell you to come back the next day. (Marilyn)*

Apart from the issue relating to the efficiency of the administration system, Marilyn also mentioned that the lack of English proficiency on the part of Chinese staff working at the

Foreign Students' Office undermined their credibility and, therefore, triggered her doubt about the preparedness of the administrators for managing multiculturalism:

*Even in the Foreign Students' Office, a lot of them don't speak English or can't speak English, which doesn't make sense. Because they work at the Foreign Students' Office, so it feels like they are not really there to help us. So, there are a lot of things that make me question if they are really there to help the international students. I am starting to think that they just want international students here for the statistics. (Marilyn)*

Such a finding provides evidence to support Bergan and Restoueix's statement on the necessity for training in professional skills in some university sectors to facilitate intercultural dialogue and communication (Bergan & Restoueix, 2009, p. 35). In this regard, I would argue that ensuring the linguistic competence of the international office administrators should be considered a significant part of the university's remit.

Given the importance of the effects that the attitude of the administration has on the university climate and on intercultural relations in particular, it is imperative that the institution's management bodies include persons mandated to deal with internationalisation and cultural diversity matters. It would also be a sensible idea to introduce intercultural training to stimulate awareness of cultural differences for the benefit of professionals in these administrative departments.

#### 5.4.3 Concern for the needs of foreign students

Another practical issue rarely addressed per se is the specific pressures (psychological, organisational) that students may encounter when they are faced with a culture different from their own, or when they are quite cut off from family and friends because they are studying away from home. In this instance, priority should be given to providing relevant services to help with issues arising from international mobility: i.e., issues that arise around such things as accommodation, leisure, permits, problems with officialdom, and the like. Amongst the five priorities for the management of intercultural dialogue by universities suggested by Bergan and Restoueix (2009, p. 64), the one that appears to have direct implication for the present study relates to the development of a good intercultural climate, that is, welcoming and looking after foreign students, because creating this climate entails specific responsibilities on the part of the various university services in respect of activities that aim to bring together students from various backgrounds and to provide a welcoming campus atmosphere. Despite the fact that no official induction programme was embedded in the administrative strategies of University X,

some of the international participants still highly valued some of the precourse activities and events that helped with their adjustment to the new learning and living environment:

*I think when we arrived, there was a campus tour, so there were Chinese students who took us around the campus, showed you where the canteen was, and how to buy your food, where the different gates are on the campus, such things like that, which is quite useful. (Ben)*

*When I first came to this large city in China, they gave lectures, and activities about adapting to life in China and things like that. My study abroad programme also organised the orientation, when the first week I came here, it was before the classes started, I just went to my programme activities. They had lectures, they had activities that like going to the Gugong, or other places, then we have about one activity every week, which is just travelling in China, or doing something like that. So, for instance, two weeks ago we went to the Great Wall, and last week they did a face painting, just as Chinese opera loves to do. (Lauren)*

This finding accords with numerous researches in that it gives support to the idea that, within the broader arena of study abroad programmes, having interventions and supports that are successively provided before, during, and after students' study abroad sojourn would give rise to more robust learning outcomes. Therefore, a modification of the curriculum to integrate such schemes as induction might facilitate students' adjustment to and better understanding of the new living and learning environment (Deardorff, 2008; Engle & Engle, 2002; Savicki, 2008; Vande Berg, 2007; Brewer & Cunningham, 2010).

However, the picture is complicated when it comes to the university's responsiveness to students' needs and to guaranteeing the quality of their whole experience. As the interview accounts showed, the aspiration of some of the participants to participate in the extracurricular activities appeared to be considerably constrained by the failure of the administration system to guarantee a timely response to things such as the student's emails. Here Struan provides an example of his experience with the administration at University X:

*There is a society fair which everyone is invited to, but I didn't join any society ..., I got my name down later for some societies, like the sport societies, and they never messaged me back, I don't know why, is it because I am a foreigner, or because there was a mistake? (Struan)*

From the perspective of the participants, this lack of response to some extent undermined their attempts to sign up for extracurricular activities and, consequently, their opportunities and willingness to make contact, especially with home students, were constrained:

*I have now studied at the university for three or four semesters, and at the beginning of each semester what happens often is that they send emails saying 'We have a language partner programme, if you would like to sign up, then send emails to this email address'. So, I think this is good, but, for example, you might send an email to that email address and you never heard anything again. This happened to me at least once, so it would be strange maybe because it seems like a good programme, like I said, that was exactly what I would want the department to do, but if they don't do it properly, then it's frustrating. (George)*

Another similar case in this respect was Michelle, who expressed her disappointment with the administration system in terms of the support it was able to render in assisting international students' aspiration to establish intercultural relations with local Chinese students:

*I don't think currently the system is working. I think it's mainly if you do want to make a lot of Chinese friends, it's mainly to do with your own...like, being very proactive, which means you need to spend more time on the Chinese websites, you need to be more brave in approaching people and, like, that kind of thing. So, it's the actual system is not very good. (Michelle)*

In addition, Michelle also expressed her concern over the institution's obligation to provide pastoral care, which, from her point of view, played a vital role in helping foreign students overcome difficulties they would come across while studying in Chinese universities:

*One of the things that have been going about is the welfare. But I am not sure whose responsibility it is if the year abroad student has difficulties adjusting and needs to talk to someone, but I am aware that Chinese universities don't have the kind of welfare system, not like British universities. Because I think there have been times as well [when] some people in our class have found it really difficult, and they want to talk to someone, but they have to go and contact with Oxford, but the Oxford [side] hasn't been very responsive, because you are in China so they can't do anything. (Michelle)*

Michelle's case reflected a perceived gap in the university's welfare system when it comes to individual issues relating to international students, and points to the fact that oftentimes the Chinese-oriented counselling services provided by the higher education institutions are ill equipped to address the specific health and psychological needs of many international students. This example demonstrates that as we look towards the future and as internationalisation of higher education becomes an increasingly complex issue, the need may arise for a different approach in order to better address these issues without claiming to have a 'one size fits all' remedy for all matters relating to international students.

#### 5.4.4 Summary

Following on from the document analysis in chapter 4, the interview accounts from the international participants in the present study provide evidence that supports the argument that universities in China are inclined to pay little attention to students' integration and interaction in their residential community. The acknowledged lack of interaction between international and home students in and out of class was also found to run counter to the participants' expectations and their awareness of the significance of cross-cultural contacts in promoting their intercultural understanding and international perspectives. This finding was also consistent with Montgomery's (2012, p. 100) study which suggests that when the actual boundaries of culture are strongly emphasised, it may be more difficult for these to be crossed, since the isolation becomes more salient if the concentration is on the national boundaries and the lines that divide groups of students.

The Office of International Relations is the only administrative organisation charged with responsibility for all the arrangements that affect international students. These include informing students about the dates and documents required for visa applications and physical examinations, and providing consultation and assistance for online reservation of a place in the foreign students dormitory. Given their responsibilities and the importance of staff having the qualifications needed to implement a credible intercultural dialogue strategy, training for professional development should be made available, and intercultural competence should play a role in staff recruitment.

#### 5.5 A comparison of students' experience and perception of the institutional system with the internationalisation policy

The internationalisation policy of University X with regard to promoting all students' intercultural understanding and communication was discussed and analysed in chapter 4 and this chapter, chapter 5 has discussed both home and international students' experience and perception of the institutional system. In this section, I compare the students' experience with relevant issues in the internationalisation policy of University X, in order to see how this particular institution's endeavour to internationalise the curriculum and to develop students' global perspectives and intercultural communication competence in particular was experienced by the students themselves.



### 5.5.1 Introduction of high quality international education resources

The document analysis regarding this aspect dealt mainly with importing advanced teaching materials and assessment systems, and the students' experiences regarding relevant issues were presented earlier in this chapter. Accordingly, this policy initiative and the students' actual experience of that policy is compared and discussed as follows:

#### ***Teaching materials***

As to the teaching materials, a common perception drawn from international students' responses indicated that their needs for daily conversation and establishing friendship networks with local people outside the classroom could not be sufficiently supported by the knowledge provided by the text, as they felt the current version of the textbook for Chinese language learning was 'outdated' and 'lagged behind'. Therefore, the students' actual experiences contradicted the university's policy claim that it had introduced updated and advanced teaching materials from overseas.

#### ***Assessment approach***

Regarding the assessment system, many students felt the current language examination format, which put more weight on testing textbook knowledge than on practical skills, differed from the assessment for learning approach popularised in the Western higher education context. They, therefore, felt that the Chinese approach to assessment could not show the development of their communicative competence. In terms of the assessment approach, the claim that the university had adopted an advanced overseas system as its assessment strategy was not supported by students' experience.

### 5.5.2 Attracting international students

As discussed in chapter 4, University X's endeavour to increase the number of international students on campus was preliminarily aimed at bringing an international dimension to the institution through various degree and nondegree programmes, and that all of these focused on a pre-university (Chinese language) programme that prepares overseas students to pursue their disciplinary studies and engage effectively with the host institution.

Section 5.4.1 discussed the students' experience and perceptions pertaining to their perceived difficulties with getting access to and seeking integration into the host institution. There it was seen that inadequate Chinese proficiency acted as the major factor that impinged on international students' efforts to participate in (Chinese) student-led campus-based societies, as well as their affinity with the host community, on the one hand, while, on the other, it emerged that the lack of inclusiveness and acceptance perceived by international participants resulted either from inadequate information being offered about joining extracurricular activities or from the indifferent attitude and behaviour the international students perceived from some of the home students. In each case, these perceptions and experiences adversely affected the development of international students' sense of belonging to and being fully engaged with the host institution.

In sum, University X's policy endeavours to enrol greater numbers of international students run the risk of merely increasing their presence on campus, while contributing little cultural change in terms of the student-institution relationship. Thus, the perceptive shift in the role of international students from academic tourists to autonomous agents or cooperative partners who are being fully involved in the intercultural communication process "as a source of cultural capital and intentional diversity", as evidenced in Harrison and Peacock's study (2010), is in danger of not being realised at University X. Moreover, it appeared that the precourse language programmes failed to support some of the international students' expectations of better engagement with the host institution and were, therefore, considered as contributing insufficiently to the improvement of their host language competence.

### 5.5.3 Faculty development

Concerning teaching and learning strategies, as discussed in section 5.1, many international students were frustrated by the teacher-oriented approach to teaching. They tended to value an interactive and student-centred learning environment in which their needs for more 'speaking' than 'reading', where a dialogic approach would be accommodated, and in which their skills of interaction would be developed. However, the current teaching context was basically exam-driven. In other words, the emphasis was put more on imparting textbook knowledge and test scores than on developing students' interactive and practical skills. Consequently, University X's policy related to faculty development, which aims to equip domestic academics with global perspectives through absorbing ideas of pedagogy from various resources, such as exchanging ideas with international faculty, was not supported by the international students' learning experience, as their needs for an interactive and autonomous teaching and learning environment were poorly met by the teaching faculty.

#### 5.5.4 Extracurricular activities

As shown in the discussion in chapter 4 regarding University X's policy initiatives to internationalise its curriculum, intercultural events and activities on and off campus were meant first, to get the overseas students acquainted with the host institution and local community and to eventually gain deeper understanding of Chinese language and culture, and secondly, to provide opportunities for both home and international students to engage with each other, and more importantly, to promote the institution's 'internationalisation at home' process.

As far as the international students were concerned, most of the extracurricular activities did help to develop their (intercultural) knowledge of the host culture, as well as the culture of other countries, and were conducive to promoting their skills of discovery and interaction through intentionally planned interventions. However, when it comes to engaging with home students, the finding in section 5.3 indicated that, apart from the language partner programmes, most of the intercultural activities included in this section were confined to promoting mutual contact and understanding among overseas students themselves, rather than increasing intercultural encounter opportunities between home and international students. Some activities were even considered as Western-oriented, and not likely to accommodate the socialisation practice of Chinese people. Associations such as the Western Students Union were, therefore, not seen as contributing to integration between home and international students. The present study's finding here corresponds with Leask's (2007) study which also revealed a gulf between internationalisation at home policies and the actual interactive experiences that took place between international and home student groups.

To sum up, the institution's policy regarding implementation of extracurricular (intercultural) activities has partly fulfilled its commitment to the extent that it reinforces international students' familiarity with and understanding of the host institution and the local community through activities such as off-campus travel. However, in the eyes of students the university's endeavours to engage both home and international students were far from sufficient to meet the students' expectations, as shown in the students' actual experience.

#### 5.5.5 Administration system

As is evident from chapter 4, the part of the administration system that mainly manages recruitment of international students and their relevant affairs is the Office of International

Relations. The students' experience and perception with regard to this office's attempts to promote their adaptation to and integration into the host institution are presented as follows:

### ***Residential arrangement***

Regarding residential support (section 5.4.1), most of the international participants felt disappointed by the lack of opportunities to engage with home students in the residential community. On the whole, they valued a living environment that encompassed a mixture of home and international students, as this type of community could serve as a means through which they could cooperate and improve their Chinese competency and proficiency. However, the existing residential arrangement, which separates home and international groups of students into different residential blocks that are far from each other considerably undermined international students' expectations of expanding their social circles with home students off-campus.

### ***Orientation programmes***

As is shown in Section 5.4.3, some of the international participants appreciated the precourse activities that engaged them with the host institution and also the local community. In this regard, the orientation programme offered by University X that was intended to introduce newly recruited international students to school policies and regulations, new types of learning, and their living environment gained students' approval to the extent that it facilitated their familiarity with the host environment.

### ***Managerial skills***

When it comes to the managerial system, and the administrative staff in particular, this study found that many international participants were frustrated with the administration's lack of responsiveness to their requests to, for instance, join campus-based associations and societies, on the one hand (Section 5.4.3), and by some of the administrators' inadequate English proficiency when managing aspects of the overseas students' daily and academic affairs, on the other (Section 5.4.2). Some students also perceived a gap in the university's welfare system (Section 5.4.3) that is supposed to provide physical and psychological counselling support to ensure that international students' adapt well to the host community. Consequently, the administration system was seen to be inadequately equipped and far from comprehensive in accommodating the needs of overseas students.

## **5.6 Chapter summary**

In this chapter, I have explored students' experience and perception with regard to the institutional system associated with its internationalisation policy of promoting all students' intercultural understanding and communication. In particular, the findings help to provide responses to the second research question from four major aspects: 1) students' engaging with a new teaching and learning context; 2) students' intercultural communication experience inside the classroom; 3) students' intercultural communication experience with the institutional system outside the classroom; 4) students' experience with the university's administration system.

In the later part of this chapter, I compared the students' experience with the institutional system with relevant policies discussed in chapter 4.

From a pedagogical perspective, the first two aspects correspond to University X's policy concerning faculty development and importing advanced overseas teaching materials and assessment approaches. The findings indicated that the teacher-oriented teaching and learning environment downplayed the international students' preference for and expectation of a dialogic and student-centred approach. Moreover, the textbook knowledge and assessment approaches were considered as not sufficiently contributive to students' development of practical skills and communicative competence.

The third aspect relates to the policy initiative to implement extracurricular activities in an effort to integrate both home and international students. Responses varied with regard to the extent to which these activities are successful in promoting the development of students' intercultural knowledge, skills of discovery, and interaction. The findings show the increased presence of international students on campus can not, of itself, guarantee meaningful intercultural communication, but rather that intentionally planned interventions are needed to engage students from various cultural backgrounds with one another. Moreover, the extracurricular (intercultural) activities noted in this chapter were more conducive to reinforcing intercultural contact among international students themselves than to their integration with home students. These activities, therefore, run the risk of impeding the process of internationalisation at home.

The fourth aspect concerns an underresearched area—linking students' intercultural and international experience to an institution's management administration system. This discussion also shed light on the existing literature on curriculum internationalisation with regard to the crucial role that administrators should take in managing overseas students' various affairs ranging from academic to sociocultural and welfare issues. Furthermore, it inspired the call for professional training for both faculty staff and administrators who cater to the needs and demands of a diverse student population.

The issues explored in this chapter have related to the second research aim, concerning mainly with the international sample of participants, given the focus of the last research aim—to understand both Chinese and international students' intercultural communication experience on and off campus from the perspective of the international students who took part in this research. In the next chapter, I give equal attention to the experience and perception of both student groups and to see how they make sense of their intercultural communication experience with each other by drawing on Byram's model of ICC as the theoretical framework.

## Chapter Six: Students' Experience and Perception of their Intercultural Communication Experience

This chapter sets out to establish an emic interpretation of international and home students' intercultural communication experience with one another, and, in particular, their perceptions pertaining to such experience. The research question concerned with this chapter's discussion is: *How do students perceive and make sense of their intercultural communication experience?* The overarching theoretical framework that underpins the analysis is Byram's (1997) ICC model, with especial focus on his five *savoirs*, was used as a means of conceptualising participants' understanding of their communicative behaviour during their sojourn in China. The reason for probing how participants appreciate their intercultural communication experience is, on one level, to identify the nature and extent of intercultural contact that these students have experienced at University X, and, on another, to theorise this experience in terms of their (developing) intercultural competence.

The major themes that emerged from the data that are relevant to the research question are: 1) language issues; 2) differences in motivation and life style; 3) attitudes towards intercultural communication; and 4) rapport with the local community.

### 6.1 Language Issues

As regards the complexities of the international participants' linguistic backgrounds discussed in chapter 3, two thirds of them were either from America or the UK, and had English as their first language. The remaining third had communicative spoken fluency in English. Therefore, the term 'language issues' in this section refers specifically to the difficulties faced by the international students in communicating with native Chinese, and also in taking part in extracurricular activities. Although the language training programme endowed them with a basic command of and competence in Chinese, this was far from enough to allow them to have good interactions with Chinese students. Therefore, to make sense of this substantial barrier which was faced by the majority of international participants is to shed new light on their satisfaction with the degree of their integration into the host institution. My thematic analysis shows that issues associated with lack of language proficiency were manifested in the following two areas: 1) difficulty in negotiating participation into the host institution; and, 2) difficulty in establishing relationships with home students.

#### 6.1.1. Difficulty in negotiating participation

The issue of L2 learners' participation and socialisation in the new academic community is closely related to important issues such as competence, agency, and access (Duff, 2002; Norton & Toohey, 2002), amongst which linguistic competence must be foregrounded, as it endowed learners with "the ability to apply knowledge of the rules of a standard version of the language to produce and interpret spoken and written language" (Byram, 1997, p. 48). In other words, insufficient language proficiency may increase learners' difficulty in negotiating their participation in institutional activities. This phenomenon was manifested in this study by the hesitance of the international students to actively participate in extracurricular activities as a result of their lack of linguistic competence:

*If you join extracurricular activities, that's quite difficult, because there is a language barrier, because when you join an extracurricular course which is in Chinese, it's a little bit difficult to move your way around it. (Michelle)*

Similarly, imperfect Chinese proficiency reduces international students' willingness to take an active part in institutional activities to a large extent. As Dasha remarked:

*But I think not so many foreign students were interested in such activities, because their Chinese was not proficient enough to understand those activities and to communicate with local students in those clubs. However, for those students who are taking actual courses or doing master's here, they may benefit more from joining those clubs and associations, not only for improving their Chinese, but also for making more friends. (Dasha)*

This critical condition was also perceived by some of the Chinese master's students, who also pointed to a lack of language competence as the main hindrance that created foreign students' reluctance to participate in such institutional activities as the language partner programme:

也跟汉语水平有关，像初级的学生都不报语伴项目，因为她们觉得自己有了语伴也没法跟她们练习汉语，因为自己水平还不够，所以通常报语伴项目的还是中高级的学生比较多。(Wu)

*It is just mainly because of the language proficiency that did not allow them to join in the language partner programme. For those students in primary-level class, seldom did they show any interest in that, as they felt that lack of language competence prevented them from practising Chinese with local students. (Wu)*

In addition, some of the international students also attributed their failure to gain full membership of the host institution to the 'language barrier'. As Michelle claimed:

*I find they don't encourage me to become a part of the university, which is quite sad. I think again it's mainly the language barrier, because they have a website with all the columns written in Chinese, so it's quite difficult to navigate the way around it. And then when you do like all the people in the*



*club, the club site is in Chinese, so it's mainly just the language issue.*  
(Michelle)

Overall, as the above discussion indicates, many of the international students' intention to enact their personal agency in response to the new sociocultural or pedagogical contexts was considerably constrained by their lack of language proficiency. According to Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001), agency arises out of a constant coconstruction and renegotiation with those around the individual and with the society at large. From the critical discourse perspective, individuals are accorded agency to resist being positioned marginally in dominant discourses and to fashion alternative subject positions that fulfill their goals and purposes (Canagarajah, 1999; McKay & Wong, 1996; Rampton, 1995). However, a lack of language competence increased the risk of impeding overseas students from exercising their personal agency, which, as a result, gave rise to their minimal participation and their occupying a relatively peripheral position in the new academic discourse.

Such findings indicate that linguistic competence, which Byram (1997, p. 48) defined as "the ability to apply knowledge of the rules of a standard version of the language to produce and interpret spoken and written language", constitutes the fundamental skill needed for foreign students to become fully involved in institutional activities. Consequently, the lack of such skill limits their ability to benefit from opportunities to integrate with home students.

#### 6.1.2 Difficulty in establishing relationships

According to Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence, linguistic abilities are closely associated with mutual understanding and effective negotiation in intercultural encounters. Findings from my study also suggest that most of the international participants ascribed their difficulty in affiliating with Chinese students to a lack of language proficiency. Olivia, for instance, elucidated how language incompetence thwarted her expectation that she would make friends with Chinese people:

*I was expecting to make friends with a lot more Chinese people, but it has been a lot harder than I thought. I think it is because of the language, because my Chinese...it's a hard language. So, I never got improved to the point of fluency while I was here, but it {speaking Chinese} is a lot more challenging than I was hoping it would be when I was in China.* (Olivia)

Some even indicated that poor Chinese proficiency hindered their willingness to spontaneously communicate with the home students, which, as a result, reduced their confidence in initiating an intercultural relationship:

*Also, I can't enter a lot of Chinese students; they probably don't want to become friends with someone whose Chinese isn't fluent or very good. Then I can't have a conversation in Chinese, but I can understand what a lot of Chinese people probably think, it's quite annoying being a friend of mine, because when I speak Chinese I have to speak quite slowly or speak very basic sentences. (Struan)*

According to Struan, having a better command of the host language was a prerequisite for adjusting to the new learning and living environment:

*I think obviously through language, improving language makes it easier, if you can say more to people around you, you feel more at home. If you can't speak to anyone, you feel by yourself and you are not relaxed. (Struan)*

Struan's feeling was further confirmed by those participants who had taken the advanced level language training programme, and, therefore, showed better adaptation to the new living environment, as Dasha admitted that advancement in language competency enabled her to better communicate with people beyond the campus:

*I am in the advanced level, so I know how to communicate with local people, such as the staff in the shops, or in the transport. (Dasha)*

Dasha's feeling was echoed by Ben, who also asserted that moving to an advanced level boosted his interest in exploring more about Chinese culture and history:

*I think before when I was in the intermediate level of Chinese, it's sometimes quite difficult to keep studying. Because I find when I look at a book or a newspaper, and watch a film, I still don't quite know exactly what they are saying, so my listening skills and reading skills did not improve too much. There were still a lot I don't really understand. But I think when you study in the advanced level of Chinese, now I feel it much more interesting. I can read maybe an interesting book, like I read the book 'Leifeng—The Son of Labors', and watching some Chinese films or some TV series, so it's a lot more fun and interesting. (Ben)*

Looking through the data set, there seems to be a strong relationship between language competence and the feeling of affiliation and intimacy, as the international participants consecutively revealed their sentiment of frustration, lack of confidence to communicate, and even the sense of being isolated, which to a large extent, they attributed to their insufficient command of the host language. That situation conforms to Gatbonton and Trofimovich's (2008) study, which documented a close relation between L2 proficiency and a positive orientation towards the L2 group. However, this study has extended their finding by showing how language proficiency fostered international students' better integration into the host community.

Correspondingly, reflections from the international students' Chinese counterparts also gave priority to the influence that language exerted on constructing intercultural relationships. From Jiang's point of view, most intercultural misunderstandings can be attributed to the interlocutor's lack of Chinese proficiency:

语言还是一个很重要的因素，虽然说它不是最重要的，语言一定会阻碍你的交流，或者说你不是这个意思，然后他就觉得你可能是这个意思。  
(Jiang)

*Sometimes they took from my words a completely different meaning that created misunderstanding between us, so I think language still plays an important role in interacting with foreign students. (Jiang)*

Similarly, from the perspective of the Chinese participants, their lack of English proficiency to some extent undermined their self-confidence in intercultural encounters and thereby reduced their willingness to communicate with the overseas students in their department.

其实我觉得我来了之后好像也没有那么强烈的和外国学生交流的欲望，可能因为我英语不好，好像没有我当初想得那么强烈，来了这边自己会变得有点胆怯，可能是突然间来到了一个外国人特别多的地。（林）

*In fact, my desire to communicate with international students seems not as strong as it was supposed to be, which I personally ascribed to my imperfect English proficiency. It even made me nervous when being surrounded by crowds of foreigners. (Lin)*

This finding resonates with Ting-Toomey and Chung's (2012) conceptualisation of intercultural communication, which was defined as "the symbolic exchange process whereby individuals from two (or more) different cultural communities negotiate shared meanings in an interactive situation", within which, 'shared meaning' was highlighted as the stepping stone to mutual understanding and establishment of a relationship. Language incompetence inevitably created a lack of shared meaning and understanding between home and international students in my study, and, therefore, hindered their construction of intercultural relationships.

To conclude, responses from most of the international participants in my study indicated a close relationship between better language proficiency, 'integration' and levels of satisfaction with their experience. It was also commonly acknowledged that students who had more advanced language competence would be better integrated and thereby more satisfied with their time at the university.

## 6.2 Differences in Motivation and Life Style

Apart from language competence, there seemed to be a consensus among the participants in my study that shared interests and motivations exerted considerable influence on the relationship between international and home students. Moreover, some international participants also shared the belief that factors such as ways of socialising and life styles underpinned the bond among international students themselves, which, in turn, generated physical as well as psychological detachment on the part of home students

### 6.2.1 Disparity in motivations

As a key component of intercultural communication, motivation refers to a person's desire to foster intercultural relationships; motivation can be either intrinsic or extrinsic (Martin & Nakayama, 201). Members of dominant groups are often less motivated, intrinsically and extrinsically, toward intercultural communication than members of nondominant groups, because they do not see the incentives for doing so. This disparity in motivation towards intercultural communication is also evident in this study, and it manifested itself in two major areas: employability concern for one's future career; and, integrative motivation to engage with cultural others.

#### Concerns for future career

It is worth noting that over half of the Chinese participants were graduates from the same undergraduate major (i.e., Chinese as a second language). Their bachelor's degree programme had afforded them a variety of intercultural communication experiences with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Thus, their expectations of communication with overseas students appeared to be not as strong as those of their international counterparts. Rather, these master's students were more concerned with their employability, which Murphy-Lejeune (2002) conceptualises as the accumulation of skills, attributes, and bodily comportment prized in an international labour market. Most of the Chinese participants took 'being a qualified teacher' as their long-term goal after graduation, which accorded great value to their motivation to make contact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds:

如果将来做老师的话肯定还是要积累一些教学技巧的，就是因为将来如果真的当老师你也不可能这个班我只教日韩的学生，我肯定还是要教一些其他国别的学生，而且通过这些教学的实践，可以提高自己的教学技能。象我之前说的，我还是挺希望能够开阔自己的眼界的，所以即使我对这些文化不是很感兴趣，但是还是有必要多接触多了解。（赵）

*Although I was not really interested in Western culture, and in communicating*

*with students from Western countries, I am now gradually aware of the necessity of getting in contact with students from a variety of cultural backgrounds, not just restricted to those from Japan and South Korea, but also to be familiar with their dispositions and characteristics, which for me, was quite useful and beneficial if I choose to teach Chinese as a second language in universities as my future career, as it not only helps broaden my horizon, but more importantly, enables me to accumulate teaching experience, and, in the end, enhance my teaching skills. (Zhao)*

In addition to gaining teaching experience, Fan, a second-year postgraduate, also showed enthusiasm about coming into contact with foreign students, which not only afforded him access to other cultures, but, more importantly, prepared him for his future career:

我就想我要是能把一个班带的非常得活跃，大家都跟着我的带领往前走，然后这个关系相处得很好，而且大家在汉语上都能有一些收获，在语言交际上，然后我自己跟留学生，跟普通学生的交流如果能够更顺畅，我自己的交流能力，协调能力这方面能够锻炼的话，我觉得是非常宝贵的财富。我就想这方面有一些提升。（范）

*Last but not least of my expectations in selecting this particular major was to make contact with people of diverse cultural backgrounds, to explore their histories and traditional cultural heritage in person, rather than merely focusing on textbooks and references. As for me, the most interesting and attractive part of interacting with foreign students is to use both English and Chinese alternatively, which facilitates reinforcing my spoken English for one thing, and enhances my communication skills and coordinate ability for another. As my short-term goal is to take over a class as my internship experience, hopefully, it can endow me with the capacity of getting along well with my students and improving their Chinese to the utmost. (Fan)*

The importance attached to accumulating teaching and communication skills to fulfill the ultimate goal of employability can be explained by the changes in the attitude of Chinese philosophical and ideological circles towards pragmatism (Xufang, 1989) which put much emphasis on the practical results, and having more realistic concern over one's action. Such pragmatic objectives on the part of the Chinese students were also perceived by their international counterparts, who found that they were quite diverse with respect to reasons why they were participating the language partner programme. These perceptions resulted in the discontinuity of their meeting, and suspicion as regards the purpose of Chinese students' participation in such programmes, as evidenced below:

*Most of the language partners are from the English department; they joined the programme just aspiring to practise their oral English, not for the purpose of being a real Chinese language partner. (Matthew)*

*Because their purpose is to improve their English, so you have to split the time. And sometimes it's not very natural, it is little bit forced, because you meet to practise languages, and you think what we talk about. (Ben)*

*A lot of Chinese people I have met at the university, I feel like they are not very interested in becoming friends with you because mostly they just want to practise their English with you. Like they are not interested in you as a person, they don't want to be a good friend to you. They sort of want to use you to practise their English. They don't care about your culture. (Marilyn)*

From the perspective of some international participants, 'practising spoken English' was prioritised by most of the Chinese participants as their primary goal for joining in the language partner programme. Such perceived disparity of goals from the international students' viewpoints corresponds with the findings of Holmes and O'Neill's study (2005), in that, despite institutional interventions to integrate international students on campus, differences in goals and cultural 'rules' are still salient among the underlying factors that act as impediments to their intercultural interaction and mutual understanding with their Chinese counterparts. The findings of their research also revealed that students from Western countries are more likely to prioritise developing collaborative and interactive partnerships as their preliminary goals when engaging with cultural others.

However, such instrumental motivation, which Gardner and Lambert (1959) defined as an interest in learning the L2 in order to attain a pragmatic objective, such as to enhance one's future career opportunities, was not uncommon among the international participants or manifested in their expectation of studying abroad. By 'instrumental,' I mean that the participants prioritised their vocational concern and took the ability to speak fluent Chinese as the stepping-stone to achieving their desired vocation or gaining access to future material benefits, as Kaho exemplified:

*All people speak Chinese because China is a very, very big country. I think being able to speak Chinese is going to be a big advantage for me, like to get a good job, to get a good job in Japan, so that is why I study Chinese. (Kaho)*

Kaho's account was echoed by James, who not only prioritised his goal of improving his Chinese language, but also his aspiration to seek for a job in China:

*To improve my Chinese as much as I can is the top expectation for me coming to China, and then to meet the people here, and to understand China, and my final expectation is to get a job in China. (James)*

Such findings lend support to previous research (e.g., Carlson, Burn, Useem, & Yachimowicz, 1990) which indicated a correlation between involvement in international study and academic and career goals, and also align with Jones and Brown's (2007) assertion that diversity is now

not only commonly presented as a benefit for both incoming students and home students but also as an effective means, for both groups, of developing the intercultural skills, and other attributes, increasingly demanded by employers.

### **Integrative motivation**

Although much of the literature suggests that international students are often acutely concerned with 'investing qualitatively' in their futures (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002), most of the international participants in my study tended to discuss a more integrative side of their decision to embark on study abroad, which Gardner and Lambert (1959) identified as an interest in learning the L2 in order to interact with the L2 group as well as positive attitudes towards the native speakers of this group and their culture. There was almost unanimous agreement among the international participants that improving their language skills and communicating with Chinese people were the primary expectations they had for studying abroad. As Lauren explained:

*I just came here, and I expected to be able to talk to other Chinese students, make friends, and practice my Chinese. (Lauren)*

Apart from aspiring to build collaborative relationships with his Chinese peers, Ben also expressed his expectation that he would be able to interact with people from the local community:

*I want to communicate with people outside the campus. When I first came here, I wasn't too sure. But I think when my Chinese improved, my expectations were, I can at least speak to people on the train, or just chat with people in the street. (Ben)*

While this finding confirms Kim and Goldstein' (2005) prediction that favorable intercultural attitudes, such as interest in foreign language study, can excite ones' interest in study abroad and intercultural communication, the data in this study go beyond their study to show that participants with greater competence in the host language have higher expectations of engaging with the local community.

However, despite the international students' willingness to seek out more chances to interact with home students, there were still challenges that hindered their initiatives. George, for example, ascribed his hesitance to socialise with more Chinese students on campus to his excessive exposure to Chinese studies in class, which left him mentally exhausted:

*I would like to spend more time socialising with Chinese students and things like that. But maybe part of the problem is also that for foreigners in general, Westerners, people from Europe, learning Chinese is mentally so tiring, that a lot of people don't have the energy after they have done 4 hours or 6 hours on campus. They don't have the energy to spend more time speaking Chinese. So,*

*I think that's also something that stops Western students seeking out Chinese-speaking friends. (George)*

Similarly, Marilyn also complained that the intensive workload of the language programme stopped her from interacting with home students:

*I definitely came here expecting to interact with more Chinese people, but because the Chinese language programme at this university is really intensive, a lot of my time is spent inside my classroom, or even if I am outside the classroom, I am studying or preparing for exams. So, I don't think the university gives foreign students in the School of Chinese as a Second Language enough free time for them to interact with native students. (Marilyn)*

The data has so far illustrated how positive motivation to study abroad impels overseas students to take an active part in intercultural communication with people from the host country. However, in view of the obstacles presented here in the students' accounts, I would suggest that instead of encouraging foreign students to seek out their own ways of adapting to the new learning environment, the emphasis should to be placed on the host institution and its responsibility for adapting to the needs of a diverse student body, by recognising that overseas students cannot be treated as a homogenous group.

As shown in the above section, Chinese students were more inclined to accord priority to pragmatic concerns while interacting with cultural others. However, the data from home students' accounts showed some exceptions to this rule, as some Chinese participants explicitly expressed their expectation of broadening their horizons, and linked this expectation to their ambition to meet with foreign students, which subsequently gave rise to changes in their stereotypical ways of thinking. Having recognised the limitations and ambiguity in respect of the knowledge and updated information she had obtained through the public media, Zhao directly stated her ambition to make more contact with the outside world and bring about changes in herself:

多和外国人交流的目的应该是多了解外国文化多一点，就是想知道外面的世界是什么样的，因为之前觉得咱们大陆说实话还是稍微有点闭塞，了解外面的世界是通过新闻，但是新闻的这个真实性或者是它是有一定的选择的，也不全都是真的。（赵）

*Frankly speaking, the main factor that drove me to choose my major was the easy access that it could provide to make contact with foreign people, to know more about their culture, and what their life was like compared to ours. As far as I can see, the main channel through which we get to know the outside world is the news reports nowadays, the authenticity of which is fairly ambiguous and selective. On the contrary, I reckoned that the more opportunities that I was given to interact with foreign people, the broader that my horizons would*



*be, and the more changes that might come along with, in terms of the way that I think and deal with things. (Zhao)*

Similarly, Du also showed her dissatisfaction with the knowledge acquired from the textbook, and illustrated how her curiosity and interest in other cultures motivated her initiative to engage with her language partner, which, in turn, changed her stereotypical images towards Americans:

我觉得之前了解的都是书本上的，我特别想知道真实的情况是怎么样的。比如说他们会说美国人特别自信啊，我想看看他们是不是真的象他们说的那个样子。接触后发现其实不是，也可能跟个体差异有关吧，他表面上很活泼开朗，但是他每次考完试都说自己考得不好，而且还很忧虑。但是成绩出来之后其实还好，然后他就特别开心。（杜）

*Since most of the knowledge we were acquainted about the Western world was from the textbook, I was keen to seek out by myself what the actual situation was like. Through constant meetings with my American language partner, I realised that he was not as confident as most Americans appear to be in the eye of the public, and was also concerned about and even underestimated his ability to pass the exams. (Du)*

This finding, however, is not supported by studies conducted in the New Zealand context (Ward et al., 2005) and in the UK (Harrison & Peacock, 2010), which indicated home students' failure to experience the benefits of living, working, and studying in the international environment on which the 'internationalisation at home' agenda is predicated, because some of the Chinese students in the present study manifested high expectations of intercultural communication with their international counterparts, regarding it as a way of widening their repertoire of knowledge and bringing about personal changes.

### 6.2.2 Disparity in ways of socialising and life style

Apart from the importance attached to various motivations in fostering intercultural relationships, participants' accounts also revealed the fact that differences in choice of activity in their social life also drove an initial wedge between the two groups. The typical social life associated with pubs and drinking for students from the Western countries was perceived by some of the international participants as another psychological barrier that prevented them from developing sociable relationships with home students:

*I hoped I would have more Chinese friends, because most of my friends are still Westerners, I think it's probably...for a lot of Chinese university students, we don't have the same interests; in terms of Western students, I think we like to go to a lot of bars, and drink, and eat a lot of food, and a lot of Chinese students here live on campus; they don't go out to bars, because they have to*

*go out of the university. I think that's being in bars, that's where I met most of my new friends here, and a lot of Chinese students don't do that. (Struan)*

*I think foreign students really enjoy going to bars, going out and drinking alcohol, whereas Chinese students don't. And I think in terms of culture, in the West we like going out and drinking, that is what we do for fun. Whereas that's just not part of Chinese culture to do that much. So we think it's weird to go to KTV and not to drink alcohol. (Olivia)*

Likewise, this disparity in social life preference was also perceived by some of the Chinese participants. Reflecting on her internship experience in Australia, Mo reckoned that it was the different ways of socialising that act as one of the major blocks that prevent overseas Chinese people from integrating with the locals:

但可能中国学生唯一跟外国学生不同是不喜欢社交，不是不喜欢社交，社交方式不同，他们的社交是去 pub,是去跳舞，去喝酒，但是我们可能就是卡拉 ok,或是吃饭，所以就是社交方式不一样。(Mo)

*It is mainly because of the different ways of socialising that made it rather difficult for me to integrate into their social circle. Instead of drinking and dancing in the pub as their major way of making friends, I prefer going out for dinner in a relatively quiet atmosphere. (Mo)*

This initial wedge that resulted from different ways of socialising can be ascribed to what Montgomery (2010) defined as an emotional anchor or emotional connection that drives individuals to seek common ground with people who appeal to them. It could also be seen as the main reason that prompts them to ally with people from similar cultural backgrounds, especially when being thrown into a difficult new environment. I discuss this point in detail in the next section.

Despite the existence of differences in values and beliefs about socialising, some international participants believed that there was no intrinsic reason why relationships between themselves and home students cannot succeed. Rather, they believed that it was the mismatch in *modus vivendi* that limited the opportunities for relationships to develop further:

*Chinese students are a bit different from what I expected, because I have noticed that some of the students are very focused on studying, so sometimes it's hard to make contact with them, or because I had a language partner, but then we didn't have much to talk about, because she was studying every day. So, every day she was studying so we didn't really have much in common. Because the Chinese students are studying a lot I think, but for us it's more like for me I study but it's also for fun this year I am here. (Hannah)*

*So, I think we have quite different life styles because of that, we have a lot more times going out and having fun, going to watch films, going to the park,*

*or travelling, and a lot of local Chinese people don't have that same opportunity or time to do that, so as the problem of schedules and life style is just not that matching. (Struan)*

It seems that each student enters the learning environment with diverse ideas, values, previous experience, and expectations, all of which comprise their unique 'cultural capital' (Zepke & Leach, 2005). The concept of cultural distance, which was introduced by Gorgorio' and Planas (2005, p. 65), can be understood as the distance between how different individuals interpret and experience the same fact, situations, person, event, or norm, resulting from living and experiencing them from the perspectives of the different cultures to which they belong. In this regard, I would argue that it was the different expectations and values that the two groups brought with them that resulted in their divergent ways of spending their time at university, and also the extent to which they would integrate with each other.

### 6.2.3 The importance of common ground

As Furnham and Alibhai (1985, as cited in Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005) pointed out, international students "had a preference for making friends from the same country or students from other nations over students from the host country" (p. 210).

Most of the international students in my study described their friendship groups as being made up of a mixture of nationalities. But the range of nationalities was what they termed 'international' rather than 'Chinese'. Seeking for an emotional anchor seems to be the main reason why international students are more likely to ally with each other, as most of them attribute such an emotional connection to 'having much in common' when being thrown together in a sometimes-difficult new situation:

*It's easier to make friends with international students, because of the (common) language and culture. They understand your way in a foreign country because we share the same experience. But with the international students a lot of times because they speak English as well, and also a lot of their views are similar to our views, so that our personalities tend to be similar as well. I think it's also our cultures are probably a little bit of racial thing as well, because you are more familiar with talking to white people, so you feel more comfortable approaching a white person. (Michelle)*

The more the international student network strengthens, the less likely it may be for home students to become a part of this network. As a matter of fact, international students have more opportunities to meet other internationals and spend time together both on campus and in the accommodation:

*I think just because in my classes and in my building I am only surrounded with international people. I am definitely a lot closer to a lot of my international friends because we are going through the same thing; you know this is not their home, this is a different place; we just connect easier that way. Maybe because we all speak English. (Christina)*

There is also evidence in the literature that international student groups have a tendency to form a community of practice as they develop a particular group identity that evolves over time as students learn about each other, about their new context, and about the nature of higher education in the host country, and as they share goals and values (Montgomery, 2010, p. 18). Such a process also accords with Lave and Wenger's (1991) conceptualization of community of practice as part of a more general social theory of learning that occurs in a community through interactions of the members and for the benefit of the members. The findings of previous studies also confirm that international students are more likely to seek support from others with whom they feel cultural-emotional connectedness (Volet & Ang, 1998), which according to Thom (2010, p. 157), is a common survival strategy when living abroad. Such relationships reinforce shared ideas and values, which facilitates humour and feeling comfortable.

At least one of the reasons why the participants would turn to their conationals for emotional support was that their Chinese proficiency did not allow them to express subtle feelings and it was much easier to obtain sympathy and comfort from conationals, as exemplified by Steve and Olivia:

*I feel like in the global village a lot of times the American kids and the European kids are kind of likely to stick to themselves, and the Korean students stick to themselves too, because people just, like, tend to...they like to speak their own language, because they are comfortable with that. (Steve).*

*Most of them are from Western countries, Australia, Canada, America, Europe. I want to expand my friendship network to more Chinese. But my language isn't good enough yet to really be able to easily make friends with Chinese people. (Olivia)*

The tendency of the participants in this study to ally with other international students or their conationals echoes studies pertaining to the intercultural experience of Erasmus students, who also showed an explicit preference for mixing with other international students rather than with the host community (Caudery et al., 2009; Tsoukalas, 2008). It seems that it is much easier to seek out like-minded individuals for work and pleasure rather than to initiate a friendship network with home students:

*I feel like the international students who are European students, especially those who speak English, I feel like their culture is, like, very similar to mine,*

*so I feel, like, to me they just seem like the American students but with different accents, because they all speak English. (Steve)*

Such findings correspond with Tsoukalas' study (2008), which identified that 'strong internal cohesion', 'solidarity' and 'common purpose' within the overseas students' (p. 142) exclusive community were the main constraints that stopped them establishing contact with the host population.

However, data from this study indicate that this principle can also be applied to explain scenarios where close bonds were established between home and international students. When reflecting on the factors that foster a closer relationship with home students, some international students attributed the affiliation established with their Chinese friends to the common interests they had. Lauren, for instance, deemed the rapport with her Chinese friends off-campus as being built upon their common interest in performance:

*I guess it's easier to make friends with Chinese people at my improvisational activity, because we all have common interests, we all like to perform, we all like to laugh, we all like comedies. So it's really easy to make friends there. (Lauren)*

Another similar case in this respect was Struan. He highlighted a common interest as the basis upon which he had built a close relationship with his language partner:

*I am lucky that my language partner and I both are very interested in politics, current things and news like that, but if he wasn't interested in that, I don't really know what we would talk about, just because he is a scientist and engineer, and I am studying language and culture, so we don't really have many other similar interests, but that is not a problem because we both love politics, we talk about it the whole time, but I could imagine, for some people they probably get a language partner and they don't really have many things to talk about. (Struan)*

Concomitantly, having shared interests is also a recurring theme with the Chinese students in the study, as they see 'having something in common' as a prerequisite, without which, close relationships with foreign students can hardly be built. Wu reflected on the factors that bound her to friends from other ethnic groups, saying:

但是我觉得语言并不是最关键的，我觉得首先可能是因为我国过，可能经常跟留学生接触交流，我们交流的时候是有话可聊的，不会冷场，我觉得这是前提。我发现我们都去过欧洲不同的城市，都一样的看法，或者是我们共同认识某一个外国人，我们对他有同样的评价，我们会聊起这些。他们会发现我可能有些想法跟她们比较相似。(Wu)

*I don't think language really matters when hanging out with those overseas students, but rather those experiences and perspectives that we could share with one another predominate our relationship; for example, they were so pleased when I shared my previous sojourn experience with them and showed eagerness to teach in their country, and more importantly, had similar viewpoints towards current affairs or people that we were familiar with. (Wu)*

Similarly, Lin foregrounded having a common interest as the foundation upon which mutual trust and dependence might be built with the international students:

有共同的爱好，还有我可以帮助他们学汉语，然后他们也需要我。（林）

*I think common interest is pivotal in establishing a close relationship with foreign students, and moreover, they sometimes rely on me to help improve their Chinese proficiency. (Lin)*

According to Bonvillain (2003), it is not only the language that influences the development of relationships, but communication skills, topics, goals, and settings, which underscores the complexity of intercultural relationships. The participants in this study foregrounded the common ground, especially in relation to topics and viewpoints, that underpinned their intercultural interaction with people from other cultural backgrounds. This finding also echoes Chen's (2002) study on initial encounters, in which she highlighted the positive correlation between common ground and the students' communication satisfaction with cultural others.

### 6.3 Attitudes towards intercultural communication

Positive attitudes towards intercultural communication are deemed to be a prerequisite for successful intercultural interaction (Byram, 1997). Similarly, Deardorff's (2006) pyramid and process models of intercultural competence also foreground the idea that positive attitudes encouraged respect and openness, as they laid the foundation for constructing intercultural competence over time. In this section, I will draw on Byram's (1997) model, with a particular focus on the *savoir être*, as a starting point from which to interpret how participants' positive attitudes correlate with their intercultural communication experience. Bearing that in mind, those themes that emerged from the data that accord with Byram's conceptualisation of *savoir être* were: curiosity and interest in seeking for differences; open-mindedness; and, readiness to suspend disbelief and judgment.

#### 6.3.1 Curiosity and interest in seeking for differences

Curiosity is explicitly recognised in the attitudes component of Byram's (1997) ICC model,

which, in more psychological terms, can be seen as “a form of cognitively induced deprivation that arises from the perception of a gap in knowledge or understanding” (Loewenstein, 1994, p. 75). Accordingly, the participants' desire and interest in exploring more about a different culture and perspectives, based on their existing knowledge of the host nation, emerged strongly in this study, as exemplified by Steve:

*I guess I just expected that not only my language skills, like my speaking skills to go up, but I also wanted to learn more about Chinese culture, and just general perceptions that Chinese people have about their own country. (Steve)*

Similarly, Ben's interest in Chinese history and politics stimulated his initiative to discover Chinese people's distinctive ideas and perceptions towards different politicians:

*For example, if I am in a restaurant, or a local café, [and] there are some old people sitting next to me, our backgrounds are very different, so we may not have a lot of topics to talk about. But if I am interested in Chinese history and politics, they will definitely know about Chinese history and politics, such as The Old Summer Palace, or The Opium War, all these different things. Then we can discuss previous leaders of China like Sunzhongshan (Sun Yat-sen), Chairman Mao, and Chairman Deng, Premier Zhou, we could talk about the perspective and impression of Chinese people towards their leaders. So I like to discuss these topics and see what they think about the different politicians. (Ben)*

Byram (1997) proposed that one's willingness to engage with others can be manifested as one's interest in “the daily experience of a range of social groups within a society and not that represented in the dominant culture” (p. 58). In this regard, international students' responses clearly showed high sensitivity to the importance of engaging with local people, and seeking out chances to get to know more about Chinese culture and local people's lives:

*But the main reason that I came to China to study abroad was that I could have those, like, daily interactions, speaking Chinese, kind of immersion into the language. (Steve)*

*I would take deeper from more conversation, to know more about Chinese economics, politics, although most of the time I can't understand them, it's nevertheless an efficient way to improve my Chinese. (Matthew)*

*Because I want to speak Chinese all the time, to not only practise my Chinese, but also to know the Chinese culture and people, I think when you go to one place, you should meet the locals. (James)*

This enthusiasm and eagerness to build rapport with locals was also perceived by some of the Chinese participants:

一种就是特别不想跟自己国家的人继续玩，他们就说我们是来学汉语，我们不想跟我们自己国家的人在一起，她们希望学校能把她们拆到不同的班级，她们想跟同为二语学习者的人交往，或是跟中国学生交往。  
(吴)

*It also depends on how eager they are to engage with Chinese students, some of them (international students) even asked to be allocated to classes that were exclusively taught in Chinese. (Wu)*

Indeed, the data so far have indicated that for most international participants, their curious mentality served as a strong motivator and affective resource that may reinforce their cultural knowledge of the host country. This point of view was also widely endorsed among the Chinese students when they were elaborating on their expectations when selecting their major subject:

可能就想多了解他们国家的文化或是他们是怎么生活的。(姜)

*One of my expectations in respect to communicating with foreign students is to know more about their culture, to understand their idiomatic way of living. (Jiang)*

我觉得对于和外国学生交流主要是想了解一下他们的文化吧。(于)

*Personally speaking, my main purpose of interacting with foreign students is to get acquainted with their culture.*

It seems that the home students' curiosity about other cultures and different ways of living provoked them into intercultural communication with their international peers:

开阔视野，还有就是我觉得之前了解的都是在书本上的，我特别想知道真实的情况是怎么样的。比如说他们会说美国人特别自信啊，我想看看他们是不是真的象他们说的那个样子。(杜)

*As a matter of fact, what I know about other countries was mainly confined to the knowledge in our textbooks. I am eager to figure out by myself whether it accords with the reality. For example, there seems to be a consensus that American people are more likely to be confident, and so I am curious about the truth. (Du)*

虽然我以前就是一直很希望跟更多的外国人交流，但是以前可能会比较停留在那种欧美国家 但是现在我会觉得我也想跟更多来自不同国家的人接触，会更想认识这些人，然后知道她们有什么不一样的一些习俗啊，或是比较好玩的事。(夏)

*Previously, my friendship network with people from other countries is merely limited to students from Western countries, but now I am keen to make contact*



*with people of various nationalities, and get to know what different customs they have, or some interesting things that have happened in their lives. (Xia)*

However, there appeared to be an exception amongst the Chinese participants who showed a lack of curiosity and interest in seeking intercultural communication with their international counterparts, due to their different value systems:

关键是我对欧美一些文化没有特别大的想了解的興趣，越来越觉得可能跟我的自己的这种传统的价值观念可能还是有一些冲突，所以后来就也没有去主动地跟那边地学生交流。(赵)

*I've become more aware that the key hindrance that holds me back from approaching students from Western countries stems from the ideological conflicts between their worldviews and the Chinese traditional values, which also gave rise to my lack of interest in getting to know their culture. (Zhao)*

This finding demonstrated the opposite side to the coin that Pusch's (2009, p69), study found in that it identified that students who are intrinsically motivated toward intercultural communication may have a higher tolerance for uncertainty, in that their curiosity leads them to engage with others who are different because they find the self- and other-knowledge gained rewarding.

### 6.3.2 Open-mindedness

According to Byram (1997), *savoir être* refers to "curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own" (1997, p. 50), which he further highlighted as the precondition for successful intercultural interaction. Indeed, the open-minded attitude emerged very strongly in this study's data. The concept of open-mindedness is often defined as an "open and unprejudiced attitude towards out-group members and towards different cultural norms and values" (Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee, 2002). Accordingly, analysis of the data showed that both international and home students foregrounded an open-minded attitude with regards to engagement in intercultural activities, as well as encounters with cultural others, which, in turn, becomes the basis upon which a closer and personal intercultural relationship can be built. The most frequent words the participants used to show their open-minded attitudes were 'proactive', 'learn by yourself' and 'keep an open mind'. Some specific examples are listed below:

*I think it's mainly if you do want to make a lot of Chinese friends, it's mainly to do with your own..., like, being very proactive, which means you need to spend more time, like, on the Chinese websites; you need to be more brave in approaching people and, like, that kind of thing. (Michelle)*

*I think here in 1 year in China, I have learned more than in 3 years in Spain. If you want to see how the Chinese economy is growing, you have to come to China. If you are outside, you can't know anything. I think you have to see the things with your own eyes. If you asked somebody, somebody said China is bad or whatever, you read about this, and you believe in it, maybe it's not true. I think you have to come and learn by yourself with your own eye. (James)*

*Because I feel like when I am somewhere going to meet people or travel to places, it's best to keep an open mind, and not to have many expectations about what people are going to be like. (Lauren)*

This view was also shared by most of the home students, who held the belief that keeping an open mind and always being proactive was the key factor for establishing and reinforcing intercultural relations:

但是只要你愿意跟外国学生交流，性格比较开朗的，身边都会有几个外国朋友的。（吴）

*But as long as you are willing to communicate with foreign students, and have an open mind, it is quite easy to build up a friendship with them. (Wu)*

In contrast, most Chinese participants tended to entertain the idea that shyness and the closed-mindedness of traditional Chinese culture acted as major hindrances that prevented them from developing deeper relationships with foreign students, as exemplified by Yu and Zhao:

我觉得主要是我自己的原因，我不算开放型的，我有的时候也不知道该跟他们聊些什么。（于）

*I personally believe that my introverted personality underlies the difficulty in establishing a deep relationship with foreign students. Hardly can I find an appropriate topic to initiate conversation with them. (Yu)*

我在交流中比较被动，可能是别人主动找我，我才会跟他成为朋友，我不太会主动去找，无论是中国人还是外国人都是这样的。（赵）

*I am used to being quite passive when it comes to interacting and making friends with others, regardless of whether they are Chinese or foreign people, unless they take the initiative in making contact with me. (Zhao)*

This situation was not unusual. Wu, for example, recollected her conversation with the class representatives among the international student body in relation to their impression about Chinese students on campus:

我之前跟班长聊天的时候他们就说对中国学生普遍有个印象，就是中国学生太害羞了，

不敢跟他们说话。(吴)

*I think the main encumbrance that obstructs Chinese students from approaching foreigners is their inherited introvertedness and lack of confidence to initiate conversation, which is also agreed on by most of the international students in my department. (Wu)*

On the contrary, the open-mindedness and confidence entertained among the overseas students seems to increase their chances of forming a closer relationship with their Chinese counterparts:

我就觉得跟美国人相处比较好玩，因为他们比较自信，也比较开放一点。  
(莫)

*Although we are not living together, I have been getting on well with the American students in our class, because of their relative open-mindedness and confidence. To be frank, I like hanging out with them more than with my Chinese classmates. (Mo)*

本来我也很喜欢和外国学生交流，所以没有什么太大的障碍，也没有什么特别的想说可能会有什么状况，所以一直就保持着很开放的态度。  
(夏)

*I was really get keen on interacting with international students, and used to keep an open-minded attitude; therefore, there appears to be few hindrances when it comes to making contact with them. (Xia)*

Some Chinese participants even found that the positive and open-minded attitude of their international friends had exerted a profound influence on their way of thinking and communicating with cultural others:

我一开始的时候就是超级内向，但是我觉得如果我这样跟她在一起的话可能过几次她就不愿意和我交流了。所以现在和她在一起的时候我就尽量像他一样开心起来，但是平时我可能还是不愿意说话那种，但是和她在一起我会努力改。(杜)

*In the beginning I was super-introverted, but I realised later that if I persisted in keeping silent for a few more times, she might lose her patience with me and even stop contacting me as well. So now I try to change myself, and to be as happy as her whenever we are together, although at other times I could still be reluctant to speak up and kept my mind closed as usual.*

我觉得他的性格特别开朗吧，其实我们每次见面其实都很开心，他就是非常的开朗啊，很热情，所以每次见到他都会特别开心，就会促使我也保持那种积极开朗的心态。(甘)

*I think it is largely the open-minded characteristics of my language partner that led to a rather cheerful atmosphere whenever we met with each other. As a matter of fact, his positive attitude and passion for people has exerted a great influence on me, and now I try to keep a positive and open-minded mentality towards whatever happens in my life. (Gan)*

As discussed in chapter 2, implicit communication is regarded as one of the five characteristics of Chinese communication (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). Confucian rules, such as a desire to maintain modesty, lie behind this style of communication. Hence, Chinese culture does not seem to encourage people to take initiatives and to be assertive. This way of behaving still seemed to predominate amongst some of the Chinese participants, compared to the behaviour of their international counterparts in this study. However, it can also be seen from the above accounts that the enthusiasm and open-minded attitude of the international students may, to some extent, excite Chinese people's desire to have a friendly relationship with some foreigners.

### 6.3.3 Readiness to suspend disbelief and judgment

One of the attitudinal components in Byram's (1997 ICC model is an individual's "readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own, which he further elaborated as one's "willingness to question the values and presuppositions in cultural practices and products in one's own environment" (p. 50). In this regard, analysis of this study's data revealed participants' development of this attitude in two different areas: one relates to the priority given to discarding stereotypes, while the other concerns the extent to which students can tolerate ambiguity and show empathy to cultural others.

#### Deterring stereotypes

Allport (1954) defined a stereotype as "an exaggerated belief associated with a category" (p. 191) which highlighted the potential inaccuracy between information held in the mind as a belief about other social groups and the reality, necessitating the need for critical awareness of stereotypes. In addition to curiosity and openness, to deter stereotypes and 'not to judge' was seen by most participants in this study as taking a decisive role in understanding interlocutors' culture as well as their way of living in a more objective way:

*I think the stereotype stuff is unfair. I think that it's better to come to China with a more open-mind and just actually see for yourself what the culture is like here, what people are like, rather than relying on the stereotypes that the Americans come up with on the other side of the world. So, anything that I have heard, maybe negative stereotypes about Chinese people, I think those are just unfair, so coming here with an open mind definitely was helpful. (Steve)*

*I never really knew much about China before I came here. I like to keep an open mind, so I sort of go into something without judging and let me rather experience the place first and then I can make a conclusion as to what I feel about the place. So, I didn't really have many preconceptions, I am open to anything, and I knew what I need to be in China. (Patrick)*

Likewise, responses from home students also put emphasis on initiating intercultural communication and relationships in a nonjudgmental manner:

其实主要是心态，一个态度。就是你不能先预设，让他能够很自然的在课堂上表现出来，然后你不能去评价，或者是从你的角度去看他们怎么做。(夏)

*In terms of teaching and communicating with foreign students in class, I think it is imperative that you put aside your preconceptions consciously, and let them express their own thinking and opinions more naturally, and avoid judging or navigating their behavior from your own perspective. (Xia)*

我觉得就是一定要互相理解，就是不能有偏见。就比如说如果你要是对一个国家有偏见，然后你跟那个国家的学生交流，就肯定会表现出来，抵触啊或是什么之类的。就是我觉得我们在跟他交流之前应该抛弃就以前自己有的那种观点。(甘)

*As far as I am concerned, mutual understanding is the prerequisite for any relationship; that is, we need to discard our preconceptions or even bias before interacting with people from other countries, otherwise the chances are greater that we will be preoccupied by stereotypes towards some particular ethnic groups, and even bring them to the fore unconsciously. (Gan)*

我觉得他的很多观点对我来说很有启发。比如说 don't judge, 就不要判断，不要比较，因为中国人很爱比较，就是对一个事情不要做出高低、价值的判断，我们不应该以我们自己的尺度去衡量别人。(刘)

*I was quite inspired by the viewpoints of my language partner, such as don't judge, since it is quite common that Chinese people tend to compare and make judgments about other's values based on our own value system. (Liu)*

#### Being acceptive and empathetic

To go one step further, some Chinese master's students tended to entertain the idea that a fruitful intercultural relationship entails one not only discarding one's prejudice, but also being accepting of cultural heterogeneity through mutual respect:

然后就是可能也还有一点吧，就是对这个对于不同文化的接纳度吧，也是一个因素。比如我对某一个文化有偏见，或者不能接受，这个交流起来可能就没有那么好。(范)

*As far as I can see, except for disregarding our bias and prejudices, another crucial factor that is conducive to intercultural communication with people from other ethnic backgrounds is the extent to which we are accepting of the cultural differences between us. (Fan)*

Reflecting on the positive influence that her sojourn experience brought to her, Mo placed high value on 'tolerance' and 'acceptance', and deemed these to be the basic principle of communication:

他们对我的影响可能是各方面吧，可能让我变得更加包容一些，碰到异质的文化都能够接受，或者是从他们身上学很多优点。比如我去年去澳大利亚一年，当汉语志愿者，然后我可以很快得融入当地的圈子。（莫）

*I am aware that the more foreign friends I have made, the more tolerant and accepting I have become when faced with heterogeneous culture. Such attitudes even allowed me to get on pretty well with my working colleagues in Australia last year, and made the most of such precious experience. (Mo)*

This view was also shared by Yu, who came to realise the importance of 'being empathetic' in initiating the relationship with her Korean language partner:

另外一个就是可能是对各自的文化比较认同的时候，就是比如说我觉得韩国的东西有的还挺好的啊，就还挺喜欢，她就愿意介绍给我啊。（于）

*I think perhaps being empathetic with each other, as regards to our respective cultures can also account for a closer intercultural relationship. For example, my Korean language partner was quite keen on introducing some Korean products to me when I showed my interest in and even craving for them. (Yu)*

In addition, some participants also came to realise that having empathetic understanding of distinct systems and practices enriched their cultural and intercultural resources and repertoire, which, in turn, enabled them to mobilise their self-realisation and personal growth. While talking about the extent to which broad-mindedness changed her own way of thinking, Christina expounded:

*It definitely geared me to see things internationally. Because when you have all these people from different countries, and different cultures, and they speak different languages, it makes me think more 'big picture', you know, instead of thinking about just my country, or myself, but to think about others, because those places and those languages, those cultures are just as important as your own, to be objective about things that I can't understand. (Christina)*

Concomitantly, Lin, a second-year Chinese postgraduate also put high value on interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds, as it broadened her mind to the extent of seeing things from another's perspective:

然后也有一些国际化视角，就不会见到其他国家这种或是那种的行为方式生活方式就会觉得大惊小怪，然后就觉得人家这样做是有理由的，背后是什么什么样的。(林)

*Instead of being astonished by their different ways of living and behaviour, I have now begun to see things from an international perspective, and to be alert to the cultural background that underpins their opinion and behaviour. (Lin)*

The emphasis placed on acceptance and tolerance accords with Barrett's (2008) conceptualisation of the attitudinal construct underlying interculturality which presupposes empathy, respect, and tolerance of ambiguity towards cultural others, and, in turn, was manifested in the participants' growing awareness of the significance of empathy and acceptance (of difference) in successful intercultural communication.

#### 6.4 Rapport with the local community

Interactions with the local community have been identified as significant in helping sociocultural adaptation (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). The data in this study showed that the participants did have some local connections for social activities outside their college life. The participants talked positively about the function of these networks and considered them not only as the highlight of their social life, but also as an opportunity to interact with people from all walks of life.

##### 6.4.1 Acceptance of the host community

According to Montgomery (2010, p. 126), the acceptance of the host community underscores the significance of the international students' social network to their learning experience. In this regard, data from the present study revealed that quite a few participants were surprised by the courtesy and hospitality of people from the local community, a response which also changed their preconceptions about Chinese people in general:

*But I think the Chinese people in China and abroad are very different; their characters and behaviors are very different. The people I meet in China are very open and friendly; they want to help you and be your friend, but in Spain it's not like this. They are very close and don't want to have a conversation with you, don't want to be your friend; they just want to be with Chinese people. But I think in Italy, like, the south of Europe, Spain, Italy and Greece, all the overseas Chinese are the same, they stick to Chinese people and are very close, and don't talk with us. But in China, people are very different, they like to talk with me. (James)*

This finding echoes the finding of the UKCOSA study, which identified that there were positive experiences once the negative expectations had been proved wrong (Merrick, 2004)

James' feeling was also echoed by Patrick and Olivia, who appeared to be amazed by the politeness and cordiality of Chinese people, which did not fit with their expectation:

*I wasn't aware how welcoming Chinese people were, and how welcoming they were to foreigners especially. It was just the most amazing thing to be able to come here and think I feel welcomed here. I wasn't expecting Chinese people to be as welcoming as they are. (Patrick)*

*People both on campus and outside the campus, when they meet you, they are very, very polite. For example, people always let you go first, or hold the door for you, or just say 'after you', and I mean we do that in the West as well, it is not like what I was expecting it to be. (Olivia)*

According to Iredale (1994), the power of the experience of living abroad lies in the enormous changes in perception that new cultural and educational experiences can effect. While the process of these changes may occur through a form of reflexivity by which learners can see the culture and social identities of others in a new and interesting light, students' intercultural experience with the local community in this study appeared to endow them with the skills of discovery, which, according to Byram (1997), refers to the ability to identify new knowledge and practices of a given culture, that is, the hospitality and acceptance of the local community in this case, which subsequently led to the international students' new perception of local people.

Similarly, Kaho was also impressed when she found that local people were respectful and showed interest in her culture instead of keeping a distance because of her nationality:

*One thing that I was very interested by is that sometimes Chinese people asked me where I am from, and I said I am Japanese, and they say, like, oh, really, they will say 你好的日文 ('hello' in Japanese), or something like that, I did not expect that, because I think when I say I am Japanese, Chinese people may look down upon me, but I have never seen Chinese people saying that; sometimes Chinese people say 'Kon'nichiwa' ...oh, Japanese, and they only like animat in Japan or they only like the drama or music in Japan. When I heard that, I am so glad. I found that Chinese people were so interested in Japan, and the products in Japan. (Kaho)*

This finding conforms to those of previous studies in that, student's international experience is influenced by their perceptions of how well their cultural attributes are valued, accommodated, and how differences between their cultures of origin and immersion in the host culture are bridged (Cabrera et al., 1999; Walker, 2000; Thomas, 2002). In addition, amongst the international students, there was a strong sense that their experience of moving to a new social and cultural context enabled them to achieve a development in their perception of themselves



and others:

*I think the taxi drivers are very knowledgeable people, are ideal teachers for me. I was surprised that ordinary Chinese people could enjoy freedom of speech as much as we do in the U.S. Sometimes I was astonished by the width and depth of their understanding about international affairs; a lot of people I met, they really understand international situations; they even know the operation of the government. (Matthew)*

Matthew's account lends support to Alfred, Byram, and Fleming (2003) concept of "the discovery of self through the discovery of otherness" (p. 109), which they argue can be seen as a growth spiral in that the process of learning to understand cultural otherness leads to enhanced self-understanding, which, in turn, supports greater understanding of cultural others. Moreover, international students' accounts in the present study also indicated that the relationships and strong social networks built with people from the local community provided added value to their intercultural and international experience, as exemplified by James's comment:

*In my daily life I have Chinese friends; they always help me like if I needed something in the bank I don't understand so I called them or if I had a problem with my homework, I call them or I sent them WeChat, and also there were some times they buy me a drink together or they pay for me to go to KTV. When I came in February, I was broke without any money in hand, and then I called my Chinese friend and told him I didn't have a place to live, I didn't have money to pay my rent, so they invited me to live in their house, and helped me a lot. (James)*

This finding lends support to Bennett and Flett's (2001) study, which suggests that the cultural identity exhibited by minority foreign students might give them access to a network of social support that can buffer them against the detrimental effects of stress and problems.

James' a favorable relationship with his Chinese friends was a common phenomenon also found among other participants:

*My language buddies and even other Chinese friends, I help some of them with their English, and they help me with my Chinese. So, we have relationships already; the friendships make all the difference. (Christina)*

The accounts of the above participants reinforce Montgomery's (2010, p. 126) assertion that there is a strong link between the role of the relationships students made in informal learning contexts and their improvement of language and cultural knowledge of the host country. These accounts further imply that international students developed their relationships with people from the host community to various degrees, ranging from socialisation, to friendship, and to intercultural responsibility in the process of intercultural communication, where intercultural responsibility could be regarded as a higher standard of relationship building. (Montgomery,

2010).

#### 6.4.2 Discovering new cultural practices

If the theory of the community of practice is applied to the students in this study, it can be said that the students' social activity is an integral part of their learning experience. The data showed that exposure to the local community enabled the international participants to foster their skills of discovery and interaction, which Byram (1997) defined as "the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction" (p. 52), as exemplified by Christina:

*So, I learned a lot both in class and out of class, with interactions with the locals, because with the locals you can learn more standard spoken Chinese, or some more modern new words; they have all these new words, such as the new popularity of 5.20 and 5.21, which is a recently risen 'festival', though not a real festival at all. I learned such newly updated information from my younger Chinese friends. So I learned a lot in both ways. So I like both. I think I pick up a lot more like easier ways to say things with my interaction with locals. (Christina)*

In addition, there are also occasions when coming into contact with the local people introduced overseas students to the process and institutions of socialisation in the host country, especially those that are distinct from their own:

*The whole thing of taking other people out to dinner, where when you first arrive in China, if you have Chinese friends they will take you out to dinner and buy your dinner for you. I really like that. That's very nice. (Olivia)*

In the same vein, Dasha's intercultural encounter experience with the locals also facilitated access to their natural ways of living, and resulted in deepened understanding of the host culture:

*One time we went to the Temple of Heaven park, and encountered a group of more than 20 people who were singing in the middle of the square; we thought it was very interesting and strange, why people got together and started singing. But later we got a chance to talk with one of them, and this woman told us about the history of the Cultural Revolution. And one of our Chinese friends also told us that during the Cultural Revolution, those elderly people underwent a really hard time of food shortage, and didn't have enough money to buy decent cloths, but they held together with each other, singing and dancing, and enjoyed life in their own ways. (Dasha)*

It can be seen from the above examples that informal social interaction reinforced the overseas

students' development of *savoirs*, which refer to the "knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country" (Byram, 1997, p. 58), whereas I argue at this point that the acquisition of cultural knowledge and practices pertaining to the host nation in such informal situations does not happen naturally, but entails such attitudes as curiosity and interest, and also the individual's reflection on such intercultural experience.

#### 6.4.3 Home-stay and travelling experience

In terms of 'other' learning that takes place in addition to the acquisition of subject knowledge, most participants in the present study gave priority to the knowledge gained through social life experience, such as home-stay and travelling around the host country, which, according to Montgomery (2010, p. 76), was about learning "how to live in a new context, and perhaps also "a springboard for learning about oneself and the other people". International students who had home-stay and travel experience in the host country unanimously regarded these experiences as adding great value in improving their language skills and also intercultural knowledge about distinctive ways of living in China, as exemplified by Olivia:

*I lived with a Chinese family for 4 weeks in Shijiazhuang. That was really good. Because living with a family I got to see how real a Chinese family lives, and like they had little practised calligraphy, they didn't do calligraphy but they have practised all that kind of stuff, just for fun. And how they all worked extremely hard about this, and the way they cook their food in the kitchen, like close the door when they are frying things. Such experience was really great for my Chinese and it was really great for seeing how Chinese people live. (Olivia)*

Olivia's feelings were also echoed by Hannah and Lauren, who also deemed their home-stay experience as enjoyable, and as playing an important part in their familiarising themselves with and adapting to the new living environment:

*I just lived in a Chinese family and I lived first with a couple, and they were like 40 years old, and then they moved out and the parents of my hold's mother, they moved in, they were like 60 years old, so they were very traditional, and they had very traditional food, and they told me about the yin and yang, so that was really interesting. I think my language also got improved because I learned to speak Chinese the whole day, and gradually got, like, more feeling for the language. (Hannah)*

*I like doing home-stay with the Chinese family. It's really nice. Because we always like talking during dinner, like maybe every other night, because the mom is very nice; she always speaks with me, talks about her day. I have learned a lot about Chinese food from them. (Lauren)*

This finding provides evidence to support Byram's (1997) conceptualisation of *savoirs*, where he further argues that one of the objectives for acquiring intercultural knowledge is to know about the social distinctions dominant in the host country, and how they are marked by visible phenomena such as food and clothing, and invisible phenomena such as language variety, nonverbal behaviour, or modes of socialisation and rites of passage. In this sense, the home stay experience can be seen as playing a significant role in improving foreign students' host language skills, on the one hand, and giving them easy access to the distinctive traditions and ways of living of ordinary people in the host community, on the other.

Another point of agreement among the international participants with regard to ways of enriching their intercultural and international experience is their travelling experience across the host nation, which also appears to be conducive in improving their language skills:

*I think when I am travelling, my Chinese improves a lot, because I am going to other places in China and talking to real Chinese people. (Marilyn)*

In terms of the benefits of travelling with local people, Hannah and Michelle further pointed out that such experiences enabled them to move beyond the confinement of classroom interaction, and hone their intercultural communication skills in a more casual discourse:

*Because I also noticed when I travelled in winter, that was really helpful because you actually have to practise yourself and that's more helpful than only talking in class, I think, because I also met a lot of Chinese people while I was travelling. (Hannah)*

*When I was travelling with a Chinese family, everyone was just telling me everything about, like, Chinese opera; it's very interesting, it's more travelling and finding your own way of interacting with Chinese people. (Michelle)*

The above accounts show that the international students in this study saw exposure to the local community, basically travelling and talking with local people, as a means of gaining access to the host country's normal ways of living, which to some extent, enriched their sojourn experience. It seems that, for them, experiential learning was as important as learning the language in class. They tended to view this type of learning as an integral part of their learning. The data were also consistent with Bennett's study (2009), which showed a positive correlation between homestays and intercultural learning, as Bennett suggests that it is the interpretation of the homestay experience by the study-abroad students themselves, typically through relating and communicating with the family, that generates the experience.

However, I would argue that superficial meetings or merely travelling with locals can not, of itself, generate "skills of interaction", which according to Byram (1997) refers not only to "the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time

communication and interaction” (p. 52), but also depends on how foreign students interpret and internalise such experience by identifying significant references, social distinctions, and conventions of interaction that are particular to the host culture and using them appropriately in real-time interaction. As Matthew indicated, travelling through different places across the nation changed his stereotype that “*Chinese people are just one type*”, and enabled him to discover the diversity of accent, personality, and specialty within the whole population:

*I travelled on a slow train for 36 hours from Guangzhou to Kunming, so I got to see a lot more people in China, diversity I mean., My original idea was that all Chinese people are just one type, and traveling to different areas, meeting people who speak...like in Guangzhou, I can understand my Mandarin is very difficult for me to communicate, in Kunming, everywhere has their own specialty, they have their own accent, all their foods are different, that's the sharp contrast I didn't expect before. (Matthew)*

Similarly, George accorded added value to his travelling experience by elucidating how the ‘stories’ as he called them, or the cultural knowledge acquired through travelling across the nation facilitated his contacts with the locals:

*I think it (travelling) helps you because it gives you more things to talk about and it also helps you connect with somebody ... so I think it's even more helpful if you have been travelling; it makes you more interesting as well, I think; you know, people who have travelled more, they tend to have more stories. (George)*

This finding provides evidence of the constructivist roots of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett 2004), particularly Kelly's (1963) statement that “experience is not a function of being in the vicinity of events when they occur, but rather it is how one construes those events that makes a person more or less experienced”. However, as Berg (2009) revealed in his study, experiential activities such as homestays and travelling were not in themselves correlated with measurable intercultural learning, but rather relied, to a large extent, on the institutional interventions that facilitate students' construal of the events as intercultural learning experiences. In this regard, I would suggest that an institution's strategy for internationalising its curriculum should not be limited merely to exposing its student population to the multicultural environment. Rather, emphasis has to be placed on interventions, either pedagogical or extracurricular, to reinforce students' critical understanding of their intercultural experiences.

## 6.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have presented both the home and international students' understanding and perception of their intercultural communication experience with one another, and with the local community. Here, four major issues were identified as decisive factors that not only shape the way students communicate with and perceive of one another, but how they develop their intercultural communicative competence.

Those factors that emerged from the data that accord with Byram's ICC model are: language issues and attitudes towards intercultural communication.

From the linguistic perceptive, language issues refer specifically to the difficulties faced by the international students in communicating and affiliating with Chinese students, and also in negotiating their participation into extracurricular activities. Chinese students also encountered a similar issue in terms of their lack of English proficiency, which undermined their self-confidence in intercultural encounters and reduced their willingness to communicate with the overseas students.

From the attitudinal perspective, those factors that fit with Byram's *savoir être* and were perceived by both home and international students as conducive to their intercultural communication are: curiosity and interest in seeking for differences; open-mindedness; and, readiness to suspend disbelief and judgment. Both groups of students foregrounded curiosity and open-mindedness as the threshold of initiating conversation and building later, closer intercultural relationship with each other. To some extent, the open-minded attitude of international students also excited Chinese people's desire to have a friendly relationship with some foreigners. Corresponding to Byram's conceptualization of "readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own", both Chinese and international students suggested that a fruitful intercultural relationship entailed not only discarding one's prejudice, but also being accepting of cultural heterogeneity through mutual respect.

The factor identified in this chapter as underpinning the bond between students themselves, but which cannot be categorised into Byram's *savoir être*, is 'differences in motivation and life style'. The findings showed that home students were motivated by either their concern for their future career or by the expectation of integrating and communicating with cultural others, while students from Western countries were more likely to prioritise developing collaborative and interactive partnerships as their preliminary goals when engaging with cultural others. These differences, along with their different ways of socialising, act as major blocks that prevent integration between overseas and Chinese students. In this regard, both groups of students foregrounded 'having [a] common interest' as the foundation upon which mutual trust and intercultural relation could be built.

The scope of this inquiry goes beyond intercultural communication between international and home students on-campus to explore the extent to which students' intercultural communicative competence was developed as a result of their interaction with the local community. The findings show that international students' local connections outside their college life not only changed their preconceptions about Chinese people, but also introduced them to the process and institutions of socialisation in the host country. importance was also given to home-stay and travel experience in terms of improving not only their host language skills but also their knowledge of the distinctive way of living in China.

The findings contribute to Byram's *savoir être*. First, they provide evidence of two relevant constructs identified by Byram—language issues and attitudes towards intercultural communication—in the context of teaching Chinese as a second language in a specific Chinese university. Second, a new type of contributing factor was found in this study, which I refer to as 'differences in motivation and life style'. Finally, the international students' rapport with the local community constitutes a new dimension in the analysis of students' development of intercultural communicative and their intercultural communication experience.

## Chapter Seven: Conclusions

### 7.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, I conclude the study with the following five sections. First, I summarise the main findings of this research and address the three key research questions (section 7.2). Second, I highlight the contributions of this study to the existing theories of curriculum internationalisation and intercultural communication (section 7.3). Third, the social and pedagogical implications are offered to inform Chinese universities, their staff, prospective international students, and the policy makers (section 7.4). Fourth, I discuss the study's methodological implications (section 7.5). Fifth, I address the limitations of this study (section 7.6), and finally offer suggestions for future study directions (section 7.7).

### 7.2 Summary of the study's main findings

As a qualitative case study, this study focused on exploring how the internationalisation policy of one particular Chinese university promotes students' intercultural understanding and communication. Three research questions were formulated in response to this research focus; the key findings that address these questions are summarised below.

*Answer to RQ 1: To what extent do the internationalisation policies of University X address the issue of promoting all students' intercultural understanding and communication?*

The data presented in chapter 4 provided an overview of the internationalisation policy of one particular Chinese university, University X, with regard to its strategies and initiatives for enhancing all students' intercultural understanding and communication. Where necessary, I also drew on internationalisation policy within the Chinese higher education context. Guided by theories of internationalisation at home, curriculum internationalisation, and intercultural dialogue (as discussed in chapter 2), those aspects and areas embedded in University X's policy initiatives that pertained to promoting students' intercultural understanding and communication were: 1) introduction of high-quality international educational resources; 2) attracting foreign students; 3) faculty development; 4) extracurricular (intercultural) activities; and, 5) the university's administrative system.

The first three policy initiatives were seen to contribute to the institution's process of curriculum internationalisation, with each corresponding to the call to bring an international dimension to the content of the curriculum, and, more importantly, to equip the whole of the university's student population with intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills. More



specifically, the policy that correlated with the institution's endeavours to create internationalisation at home was its strategy to implement extracurricular (intercultural) activities, as it was primarily concerned with all its student population, including the majority nonmobile students on campus. Given that one of the other research aims of my study was to explore how home and international students make sense of their intercultural communication experience, policy directed at 'internationalisation at home' illuminated my understanding and analysis in the chapters that followed. Examination of the administrative system's role, and particularly that of the Office of International Relations of University X, in implementing extracurricular activities and providing support services for overseas students led to its being linked in this study with theories of intercultural dialogue. An exploration of the influence of the institution's administrative system on students' intercultural and intercultural experience is an underresearched area within the existing intercultural literature in the Chinese higher education context. This analysis, therefore, expands understandings of the interaction of international students with their host institutions that can be found within the existing literature.

Overall, the document analysis in chapter 4 served as the 'policy framework' upon which the subsequent exploration of the students' experience with University X's institutional interventions and activities could be based.

*Answer to RQ 2: How do students experience the institutional system that is associated with the internationalisation policy of University X?*

The data presented in chapter 5 demonstrated that the participants' (mainly international students) experiences and perceptions with regard to the institutional support and activities concentrated on four issues primarily: 1) students' engagement with a new teaching and learning context; 2) students' intercultural communication experience inside the classroom; 3) students' intercultural communication experience with the institutional system outside the classroom; and, 4) students' experience with the university's administration system.

In terms of the first issue, the data captured the participants' various responses to different forms of teaching and learning while engaging in a new academic environment. In the first place, the findings in this study highlighted the important role that Chinese language teachers played in improving international students' intercultural knowledge and communicative competence. However, the influence of Confucian hierarchical educational philosophy on the teacher-student relationship meant that, while some of the international participants appreciated the teachers' attempts to enhance their Chinese linguistic competence and understanding of Chinese culture, others perceived their language teachers as authoritative and showing a lack of

concern for students' needs. The latter perception, therefore, adversely influenced their intercultural relations and academic outcomes. Second, the priority that the Chinese education system gives to exams and high scores prompted some international participants' perceptions that they were under pressure from an excessive workload, and, consequently, lacked the free time to seek out opportunities to engage interactively with home students.

The findings that related to the second issue shed light on the complex effects that classroom diversity had on the international participants' development of intercultural competence. On the one hand, the participants embraced and appreciated the value of classroom diversity and saw intercultural interactions in the classroom as a source of knowledge and mutual enrichment between culturally diverse learners. On the other hand, the participants' appreciation of a dialogic learning model was constrained not only by what they perceived as a more dialectic teaching style on the part of the teachers, but also by the absence of Chinese students in their foreign language classes. Thus, the academic and social value of intercultural communication between home and international students inside the classroom was not realised here. As a result, the international students felt that they were not developing their linguistic competence sufficiently.

The data relating to the third issue illustrated the study participants' various responses to institutional activities, especially how these impacted upon their understanding and communication outside the classroom. In respect to improving intercultural contact with home students and gaining skills of interaction (Byram, 1997) in particular, the international participants gave most credit to the language partner programme and international cultural festivals. The former were perceived as conducive to enhancing linguistic competence and intercultural knowledge for both international students and their Chinese language partners, whereas the latter demonstrated the limited value of a 'culturalist' (or essentialist) approach to culture. In terms of expanding the exposure of international students to cultural others and the wider community, especially with respect to the development of skills of interpreting and discovery, the participants gave equal credit to both on-campus intercultural activities (i.e., the speech contest and the student union) and off-campus travel experiences as a means of meeting others and, therefore, enhancing their understanding of other cultures. This finding resonates with those of previous studies which showed that the interventions, such as experiential learning and opportunities to engage with host nationals, that are provided during students' study abroad sojourns (Paige & Goode, 2009; Vande Berg, 2007), are productive.

In terms of the international participants' perceptions with regard to the administration system, three issues emerged from the data. These related to: 1) the residential arrangement; 2) management skills; and, 3) concern for students' needs. The participants' critical comments on

the first of these issues drew attention to a perceived barrier that was built by the institution between international and Chinese students through the residential policy of the university, as this policy gave rise to a lack of a sense of belonging for some participants. Furthermore, it was seen that there continues to be a gap between the institutional rhetoric of internationalisation and actual practice associated with the attitudes and behaviour of university administrators. The findings indicated that a perceived lack of responsiveness to students' needs and of counselling support weakened the participants' sense of connection with the host institution and its administrative staff, and so discouraged students from participating in intercultural activities.

*Answer to RQ 3: How do students at University X perceive and make sense of their intercultural communication experiences?*

Chapter 6 identified both international and home participants' responses to and understanding of their intercultural communication experiences on the university campus and with the local community. Here, four major matters emerged from the data and were explored: 1) language issues; 2) differences in motivation and life style; 3) attitudes towards intercultural communication; and, 4) intercultural communication with people from the local community.

With regard to language issues, the findings highlighted the role of linguistic competence in negotiating international students' participation into the host institution, on the one hand, and in establishing relations with home students, on the other. Chinese language competency, therefore, was key to foreign students' ability to get fully involved in institutional activities, a point also made by Fantini (2012), who asserted that mastery of the target language facilitates one's entry into and adaptation of the host culture. Where the international participants perceived that such competence was lacking, they felt they were unable to benefit from opportunities provided by institutional activities to integrate with home students.

In terms of the second matter (differences in motivation and life style), the perceptions and responses from the Chinese and international participants were quite diverse with regard to their motivations and goals for taking steps to interact with one another. Many of the Chinese participants were motivated to engage with international students through a purely pragmatic concern about their future careers, while the international students seemed to be motivated by their desire for intercultural interaction. As such, this finding corresponds with Holmes and O'Neill's study (2005) in that the present study also showed that differences in goals and cultural 'rules' are underlying factors that may constrain international and home students from engaging in intercultural interaction and developing mutual understanding. Interestingly both studies foreground and indicate the importance of finding common ground (i.e., shared interest and goals) as the basis of promoting closer intercultural relationships between international and home students.

In terms of the participants' attitudes towards intercultural communication, the majority of the data can be interpreted and subsumed in the *savoir être*, i.e., the attitudinal components embedded in Byram's (1997) model of ICC. More specifically, the attitudinal aspects perceived by both international and home students as conducive to intercultural communication are: curiosity and interest in seeking for differences; open-mindedness; readiness to suspend disbelief and judgment; deterring stereotypes; and, being accepting and empathetic.

When it comes to intercultural communication beyond their college and campus life, the international participants first highlighted how the acceptance and hospitality of people from the local community had helped to change their preconception about Chinese people. This finding also suggests that in the context of local networks, the international participants' development of intercultural knowledge and renewed perception towards the host country as a whole were socially reconstructed through observing and talking with people in the local community. For some participants, this reconstruction led, in turn, to the development of an intercultural perspective that placed more value on treating people as individuals, that is, "discovery of self through the discovery of otherness" (Alfred, Byram, & Fleming, 2003, p. 109) and discarding the presumption of pre-existing differences, and, thus, promoted their development of the skills of discovery and interaction (Byram, 1997).

### 7.3 Theoretical contributions

The findings of the present study highlight the significant relationship between the internationalisation policy of higher education and the students' development of intercultural understanding and communicative competence in the context of the internationalisation of higher education in China. In this way, the study can, therefore, contribute to existing theories and studies in two major areas: curriculum internationalisation and intercultural communicative competence.

#### 7.3.1 Contributions to theories of curriculum internationalisation

The critical understanding and analysis in chapter 5 focused on students' experience and perception with regard to the internationalisation policy in one particular Chinese university, so that the implications of its findings could be used as a basis for improving internationalisation curriculum initiatives in the context of Chinese higher education. In achieving that end, this research has contributed to the literature on internationalisation of higher education, with special

focus on its ability to develop students' intercultural understanding and communicative competence in China in the ways outlined below.

First, while the present study has some similarities with previous studies on Chinese inherited learning culture, such as its propensity to be authority-centred, exam-oriented, and to employ a one-way transmission of knowledge approach (Hammond & Gao, 2002), it departs from them in terms of the focus given to how such a new learning environment influences the international students' acquisition of linguistic competence, intercultural knowledge, and skills of interaction. Although these are acknowledged as being key for developing intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997), the relationship between their acquisition and the teaching environment in China remains an underexplored area in the existing literature.

Given the fact that the international participants' appreciation of a dialogic learning model was constrained not only by what they perceived to be a more dialectic teaching style on the part of their teachers, but also by the absence of Chinese students in their foreign language classes, this finding is, therefore, congruent with previous studies which suggest that there continues to be a gap between the institutional rhetoric of internationalisation and academic practice (Trahar, 2011, Green & Whitsed, 2013). As such, the findings of the present study have responded to the call for interactive pedagogies that provide a space for both students and staff to include critical reflections on their own and others' academic backgrounds (Trahar, 2008). Moreover, this study has also added to perspectives of those such as Appadurai (2001), Haigh (2008; 2009), Sanderson (2007) and Trahar (2007) who foreground the importance and value of the personal awareness and reflexivity of academic staff in higher education.

Second, this study argues for the merits of both the formal and informal curriculum in supporting students' engagement with one another, and more importantly development of their intercultural understanding and communicative competence. The findings in this study indicated that the current situation seems to be at odds with principles underpinning the 'internationalisation at home' policy, as it found that that policy's core concern was directed at the vast majority of home students, and especially at creating an intercultural environment where positive cross-cultural contacts could occur. The fact that, on the one hand, this study's data showed that the academic value of intercultural communication between home and international students inside the classroom was not realised at University X (see above section), and that, on the other, intercultural activities intended to integrate diverse cultural groups were also limited to the surface level, lends support to Harrison's (2007) claim that internationalised university experiences cannot easily be engendered by simply increasing casual exposure between home and international students. The findings, therefore, constitute a response to Montgomery's (2010) call for tasks and activities that engage students in intercultural

interaction which has the capacity to give meaning and authenticity to the students' intercultural communication in personal and academic contexts. It also resonates with Crosbie's (2014) critique of the demand-led curricula underlying contemporary higher education. Instead, Crosbie attached great importance not only to physical, but also to cognitive and affective commitment in the activity, that is, to engagement with the heart and senses.

Third, this study enriches the scope of Leask's (2013) definition of curriculum internationalisation by incorporating students' experience with the institution's administration system and the local community. As such, the findings in this study show the international participants' experience and perception with regard to residential arrangements (i.e., separating international and Chinese students into physically remote student accommodation), management skills (i.e., lack of English proficiency on the part of Chinese administrators working at Foreign Student Offices), and concern for the needs of foreign students (i.e., an ill-equipped counselling service and welfare system) while they are interacting with the university's administration system. These issues were not explored in the existing literature. On the other hand, the priority given by international participants to social life experience such as home-stay and travelling experience in promoting their linguistic competence and intercultural knowledge about distinctive ways of living in China constitutes an integral part of their learning outcomes as a result of curriculum internationalisation.

### 7.3.2 Contributions to theories of intercultural communicative competence

This study drew on Byram's (1997) model of intercultural competence as an analytical and theoretical framework for interpreting the participants' intercultural communication experiences, because it offered a specific lens through which to holistically make sense of the complexities of the participants' intercultural interaction in the context of a specific higher education institution. The findings from the present study offer empirical evidence for some of the components of intercultural competence and also challenge others. Thus, the exploration of these components may provide insights for intercultural education and training in the context of internationalisation of higher education in China.

The present study focused on an area of intercultural communication that previous studies have neglected: i.e., international students studying Chinese language (i.e., Mandarin) and culture in the Chinese higher education context. As such, it fills a research gap in the field of intercultural communication and internationalisation by exploring the short-term sojourner intercultural experience of a group of international students within a Chinese higher education institution, and with the local community. Given the rapid growth in the number of students learning Chinese as a foreign language in Chinese colleges and universities, such research is both timely

and highly relevant.

The findings of this study show that both international and Chinese students construct and make sense of their intercultural communication experience from three major perspectives: language issues; attitudes towards intercultural communication; and, differences in motivation and life style. The former two constructs have been widely expounded in the field of intercultural communication, especially in Byram's ICC model. However, the findings in this study enrich Byram's model by showing how such personal factors as disparity in academic and career goals and ways of socialising offer further insights into the process of intercultural communication and the establishment of interpersonal relationships between home and international students. Accordingly, priorities were given to seeking similarities (i.e., common ground) instead of differences in reinforcing intercultural communication and relation, as discovering and focusing on such similarities may have positive effects such as decreasing psychological distance and promoting connections between interlocutors in intercultural communication. Moreover, the findings in chapter 6 also indicated the significance of intercultural communication experience with the local community in informing international students' entire experience. As such, the findings in this study showed that the international participants gave equal weight to their local connections beyond college and campus life as they did to intercultural communication inside the host institution.

Furthermore, by adopting a social constructionist approach, this study elucidates the complexity and dynamics of the intercultural communication experience of both international and home students in the context of international education. Its findings have specifically illustrated the individual differences in terms of the extent of each participant's response to the host institution's intercultural activities. Moreover, the findings highlighted that the participants' development of intercultural understanding and communicative competence was shaped and influenced by a variety of linguistic, attitudinal, and social factors. As a result, this study challenges the appropriateness of drawing on an essentialist approach when studying intercultural phenomena, an approach adopted in much of the existing literature (e.g., Chen, 2002; Kim, 2005; Gudykunst, 2005). Such an approach views the phenomena under study as stable entities with a "definable and discoverable nature" (Burr, 2003, p. 6), while failing to observe the effects of individual agency and relevant contexts on the phenomena; this type of research, therefore, fails to capture the uniqueness and dynamics of individuals' intercultural communication experiences — phenomena illustrated by the findings of this study.

#### 7.4 Social and educational implications

The findings of this study raise a variety of social and education implications for Chinese universities and university staff, for prospective international students, and for internationalisation policy makers in Chinese higher education in general.

#### 7.4.1 Implications for Chinese universities and university academic/administrative staff

First and foremost, international participants' experience with the new teaching and learning context suggests that power still plays an important part in the teacher-student relationship. Therefore, it is important to promote Chinese academic staff's awareness and understanding of international students' diverse academic preferences and learning behaviours, since trusting relationships between teachers and students minimise antagonism and maximise mutual understanding. In addition, good interpersonal relationships influence students' learning outcomes and enhance the quality of their learning (Hassan et al., 2010).

Second, the data from international participants' perceptions with regard to the institutional system indicated that international students lacked a sense of belonging. This feeling was triggered predominantly by their linguistic incompetence, on the one hand, and a perceived lack of receptiveness on the part of the host institution, on the other. Hence, it is imperative for Chinese universities as a whole nurture a welcoming, tolerant, and culturally inclusive environment in order to ensure that the expectations and goals of international students are physically and psychologically met.

Third, given the influence that the attitudes and English language competence of the administrators (i.e., especially those working in the Foreign Student Offices) have on the university climate and on intercultural relations with sojourner students in particular, it is imperative that the institution's management includes people who are mandated to deal with internationalisation and cultural diversity matters, because the findings of this study show that students find it difficult to get support and to receive timely responses from the university administrative services dedicated to catering to the needs and welfare of international students. Moreover, it would also be a sensible idea to introduce intercultural and English language training programmes for administrators who are required to keep direct contact with international students. These programmes would benefit administrative staff by stimulating awareness of cultural differences, and more importantly, increasing their responsiveness and sensitivity towards students' needs when engaging with the host institution.

#### 7.4.2 Implications for prospective international students studying in China



As suggested by the findings of this study, when engaging in academic and social practices in China, it would be useful for prospective international students to consciously develop their awareness of and sensitivity to academic and sociocultural diversities (Chen & Starosta, 1997, 2000), as well as a willingness to learn from other cultures (Byram, 1997), in order to integrate themselves into the host environment more effectively.

In addition, sojourners also need to negotiate the in-group tendency and keep wider interaction with the host culture or other international students instead of exclusive co-nationals contact if they are to enjoy a holistic experience. In other words, students should make an effort to expand and make the most of their intercultural connections on campus with both Chinese and other international students, and with people in the local community, in order to create a supportive environment, which may be helpful in promoting both linguistic and intercultural learning, their skills of interaction, and their emotional well-being during their time abroad (Anderson, 1994; Kim, 2005).

#### 7.4.3 Implications for policy makers of higher education in China

This study highlights the importance of curriculum internationalisation to larger groups of audiences; these include international and home students, academic staff, and university administrators. Hence, in the Chinese higher education context, policy makers should pay special attention to the role that faculty members and administrative staff may play in delivering the student learning curriculum (Leask & Beelen, 2009), especially the professional demand to adapt to the needs and goals of a diverse student body and to recognise that overseas students cannot be treated as a homogenous block. The findings of the present study also suggest that the implementation and delivery of internationalisation policy cannot be achieved in the absence of both formal and informal strategic efforts, as extracurricular interventions that are provided during students' study abroad periods, for instance, "experiential learning, structured reflection, opportunities to engage with host nationals" (Paige & Goode, 2009; Vande Berg, 2007) have proved to be highly productive.

Moreover, the findings of this study indicate that intercultural education should incorporate critical cultural awareness as a component of intercultural learning in the foreign language classroom. This is an area that seems to be neglected in China's higher education internationalisation policy initiatives, despite being an essential component of Byram's ICC model. As shown in not only this study, but also previous ones (Berg, 2009), experiential activities such as homestays and travel were not formally integrated into the intercultural learning curriculum of the university, but relied, to a large extent, on the institutional

interventions that facilitate students' construal of these events as intercultural learning experiences. In this regard, I would suggest that the institution's strategy for internationalising its curriculum should not be limited merely to exposing its student population to the multicultural environment (e.g., through home stays and travel). Emphasis has to be placed on interventions, whether pedagogical or extracurricular, to reinforce students' critical understanding of their intercultural experiences, which, according to Byram (1997), is "not just for the purpose of improving effectiveness of communication and interaction but especially for purposes of clarifying one's own ideological perspective and engaging with others consciously on the basis of that perspective" (p. 101). A focus on intercultural education via interventions and activities within the curriculum may also motivate all students (international and home) and all staff to develop their intercultural competence from a more solid and sustainable position, because it encourages individuals to critically engage in intercultural encounters without compromising their own identity, and to identify and reflect upon their preconceived ideas, judgments, and stereotypes of individuals from the target culture in a more critical way.

## 7.5 Methodological implications

Methodologically speaking, this study drew on a qualitative approach to explore and make sense of both Chinese and international students' intercultural communication experiences. and to probe their (i.e. mainly international students) perceptions regarding the institution's internationalisation policy. The value of that methodology was two-fold in that following social constructionist theories enabled me to conduct an in-depth exploration of the diverse and lived experiences of individuals and also to make sense of meanings underlying their accounts.

Specifically, by asking open-ended questions, I was able to collect data about individual participants' concerns regarding their intercultural communication experience, and their understanding of and responses to the institutional strategies designed to promote their intercultural understanding and communication. Such responses might not necessarily have been captured in, for example, closed-ended questionnaires. During the data collection process, it also became evident that my researcher reflexivity and communicative skills influenced the extent to which participants could be emotionally engaged in the interview process. At the same time, I was aware that my personal judgment and decision as to when and where to ask prompt questions, and especially to engage the participants in reflective practices about the events that were occurring in their both academic and life experience, was, apparently, dependent on the interview context and the individual interviewee. Through constant introspection I, therefore,

learned to judge whether sufficient information had been elicited and whether the participants had expressed their own feelings and perspectives.

Second, given my own identity as an ‘outsider’ to the institution and my sharing a similar sojourn experience facilitated the establishment of rapport with my international participants. On the other hand, being a Chinese student myself also helped me to build mutual trust and to initiate conversations with the Chinese participants who may otherwise have been inclined to hide their true feelings and perspective. However, although I was initially concerned that the power dynamics between me as a student researcher and the participants might have a negative impact on the articulation of their actual feelings and thoughts as a result of emotional pressure and psychological anxiety, I believed ultimately that my personal experiences of also having been a student in China (i.e., before studying abroad) and of being a study-abroad student in the UK helped me to establish a rapport with my participants, on the one hand, and enabled me to better understand and interpret my participants’ feelings and experiences, on the other.

In sum, the methodological implications highlighted above emphasise not only the value of adopting a qualitative approach, but also the advantages to be gained by positioning oneself as a natural ‘outsider’ in the research context. These implications may also be useful for those who consider conducting similar studies in the future, as they provide some useful insights into the research processes and the researcher’s experiences.

## 7.6 Limitations of the study

It is inevitable that, like other research, this study has its own limitations, including those noted in the contributions and implications above.

First, the aim of this study was to investigate both international and home students’ experience of the international policy in a specific Chinese university, as well as their intercultural communication experience inside and outside the classroom. Thus, the findings concentrated mainly on the students’ experiences and perspectives. However, intercultural communication and issues relating to internationalisation policy within the higher education arena include, but are not limited to, student groups. In this sense, being able to represent the voices, stories, and perspectives of others (e.g. university administrators, academic staff members) might well have provided a more holistic overview of and shed more light on the effectiveness of the internationalisation policy in terms of intercultural communication.

Second, this study was a case study conducted in a particular Chinese university. It, therefore, does not constitute a “generalisation” which is “defined in the usual sense of nomic generalisation, based upon data representative of some population” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.

120). In naturalistic inquiry, however, generalisation can be interpreted as “transferability”, which is addressed in a thick description of the research project (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 125). This study provides detailed information about the context of the study and the fieldwork process, and so future researchers can decide if the outcomes of the study can be transferred to other settings and cultures.

Third, the limitations of this study, like similar qualitative studies, lie in the subjectivity of the data and its analysis. As the majority of the data collected for this study came in the form of the participants’ oral reports, I had to rely heavily on this form of data when developing my findings and analysis. Despite my attempts to establish a sound rapport with my participants, I cannot guarantee that the participants openly and honestly shared their experiences and perception without reservation. The issue of privacy when disclosing their feelings to others may have been of concern for the study participants and so it is possible the verbal accounts that they gave of their experiences may not have accurately captured their actual behaviour or true thoughts.

The limitation imposed by subjectivity can be compensated for, to some extent, in two ways, however. The researcher can make explicit the confidentiality of using and reporting the research data, and can create an emotionally supportive interviewing atmosphere (as detailed in chapter 3) Taking that approach can ensure that research participants feel safe to share their emotional experiences openly and can encourage them to provide accounts that correspond with their actual behaviour.

The last limitation relates to the ethnic imbalance in the sample of international participants recruited from the Department of Chinese as a Second Language. As shown in chapter 3, the majority of the international students in that department come from Western countries. Only two of the participants came from other countries: Dasha came from Russia and Kaho from Japan. The constitution of this study sample means that there will inevitably be a Western bias in the outcomes of the study. To a certain extent this limitation may, however, have been mitigated by the fact that, in terms of the specific situation of sojourning and studying abroad, the participants and I had both had some similar and shared the experiences. Thus, my familiarity with the participants’ own lived experience may have facilitated better and more in-depth understanding of their intercultural communication experiences.

## 7.7 Directions for further research

While this qualitative study has attempted to offer some understanding of both international and Chinese students' intercultural communicative experiences and perceptions of the institution's internationalisation policy, based largely on the students' own narratives, a number of possibilities for further research still remain. Owing to the subjectivity of the participants' perceptions, the research findings may not have been able to accurately reflect participants' perceptions of cultural others and of the institutional system. Accordingly, conducting further research that involves academic staff members and university administrators is desirable, as a broader study might either support or contradict participants' experiences and perceptions articulated in this study. Furthermore, research based on participant observation would be complementary in exploring the possible discrepancy between participants' retrospective responses and their observed daily intercultural communication behaviour.

The findings of this study suggested that similarities (e.g., common interest, shared sojourning experience) and positive attitudes (open-mindedness, curiosity, and interest in other cultures) exerted considerable influence on how diverse cultural members perceived and communicated with one another. Thus, the findings of research that focuses on uncovering the influences that affect has on intercultural communication could be helpful in revealing ways to decrease distance and promote connections between those involved in intercultural encounters, and eventually inform policy makers within higher education. Future research, therefore, could concentrate on examining other factors, and particularly affective factors, that contribute to students' development of intercultural competence and interpersonal relations. In this way, further studies may have the potential to depict a more comprehensive picture of students' intercultural communication experiences in the specific context of higher education.

Moreover, as discussed in the previous section, voices and narratives from other members involved in (internationalisation) policy implementation and also intercultural communication with student sojourners (e.g., university administrators, academic staff members) could be taken into account in further research. Such research may enhance understandings of the consistency of the university's policy initiatives and the students' individual experience. In addition, having a more balanced sample might enable future studies to more reliably investigate responses to institutional support and development of intercultural competence, an issue which it has not been possible to explore in this study.

## 7.8 Conclusion to the study

In providing evidence that uncovers the complexity of intercultural communication in a specific institutional setting and from the perspective of both Chinese and international students, this study has contributed to research and educational practice in the following ways. First, guided

by a social constructionist perspective, this study has provided an understanding of the effectiveness of internationalisation policy on students' intercultural understanding and communicative competence in the context of a Chinese university. Second, it has enhanced current understanding of the link between curriculum internationalisation and intercultural competence. Hence, this research is potentially useful for both policy makers, educationalists, and intercultural researchers who are interested in the same field. Third, this study has shed light on the uniqueness, dynamics, and complexity of individual sojourners' experiences of an institutional system, and thus contributed in-depth understanding of the internationalisation policy. Fourth, this study has suggested beneficial practices for all parties engaged in intercultural communication in the Chinese university context. Fifth, it outlines the value of a social constructionist approach in understanding not only the intercultural communication experiences between home and international students, but also the experiences of the researcher herself. Finally, this study has provided evidence of the importance of adopting an intercultural and interpersonal perspective when examining the delivery of curriculum internationalisation, a perspective largely neglected in the existing literature on the internationalisation of higher education. The research outcomes have, therefore, uncovered a potential future research agenda.



## Appendices

### Appendix A: Pilot Interview Guide

#### Theme 1: Expectations & Motivations

Is communicating with Chinese students and people outside the campus

one of your expectations to come to China?

What other expectations did you have before coming to China?

What are your expectations for choosing the course?

How is the course running in helping with your expectations?

How other institutional activities have met your expectations?

What are the gaps between your expectations and structure of the program?

In what ways have your expectations met or not? If not, what would you like to do about that?

#### Theme 2: Stereotypes

If some of your expectations have not been met, do you think it is because of your stereotypes about China or Chinese people?

What are your preconceptions about China/Chinese people?

When did those preconceptions come from?

What examples can you draw on to illustrate your stereotypes?

In what ways have your preconceptions been challenged or reinforced since being in China?

Have you found any institutional activities supportive in eliminating your stereotypes?

In what ways that your courses or Chinese language teachers have helped you eliminating your stereotypes?

#### Theme 3: Institutional interventions & Structure of the program

In what ways does the university help/hinder your expansion of friendship circle?

Does the institution provide some opportunities to help your engagement with Chinese students?

What kind of activities do you think have met with your expectations of communicating with other international or Chinese students?

Have you found any course or activity interests you or helps your adaptation to the new environment?

What have you learned from the course or activity about Chinese culture/people?



What have you learned from the courses about communicating with locals ?

Have you learned more about Chinese people/ culture in some informal circumstances?

Theme 4: Intercultural communication experience

Can you recall an interesting conversation between you and the students from other cultural background?

What have you learned from that conversation in terms of their culture?

Can you recall a part of the conversation that impresses you most in terms of improving your Chinese or learning about Chinese culture?

Have you ever sought for a Chinese buddy?

Have you ever talked with other Chinese students on campus?

What language did you use while talking with them?

What were your conversations mainly about?

How did the conversation help your understanding of Chinese culture/improve your Chinese?

What did you learn from that?

What factors do you think are important in establishing close relationship with Chinese students?

## Appendix B: International Interviewee Bio-Data Sheet

### Personal Information

Name:
Age:
Gender:
Nationality:
Firstly Language:
Second Language (optional):
Religious Affiliation (optional):
Contact Information:

### Educational Background

Years of learning Chinese:
Years of living in China:
Training course undertaken upon departure and/or after arriving in China:
Certificate(s) obtained relating to Chinese language proficiency:

### Previous Experience of Studying/Living in another Country

Country	Degree received	Major	Years

### Working Experience

Country	Position	Years

## Appendices

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I hereby certify that the above information is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Participant's Signature\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet

I would like to invite you to take part in an individual interview talking about your intercultural communication experience with students from other ethnic groups. Before you decide whether or not to take part, please read the following information. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact the researcher. Please also read and complete the Consent Form after reading through this Participant Information Sheet.

Please read all the information carefully

**Title: Understanding the Effectiveness of the Internationalization Policy of a Chinese University on Students' Intercultural Communication Experiences**

Researcher: Miss Chen Wang (Durham University)

This interview is to investigate the student's intercultural experience while encountering and communicating with culturally different others. The aim of my study is to provide a clear, and detailed description of what it is like for students to study and live with people from other ethnic groups, and how students make sense of such experience. In order to achieve the goal of the study, the researcher needs to reflect on what the participant has to say about his/her experience, and further to compare with the university policy in an effort to evaluate its effectiveness. Therefore this interview has been prepared in order to obtain responses about what it is like to study and live in a multicultural environment and your own reflection on such experience.

Since one of the aims of this study is to shed light on students' development of intercultural understanding and communication, the responses you provide to the interviewer will be very important for completion of the study. Unfortunately, participant cannot be paid but it is hoped that the responses to the interview questions will make a significant contribution to furthering the understanding of students' experience of intercultural encounters.

The time spent on the interview will be about an hour. The interview is open-ended, and you may also be required to further explain or discuss certain points that you have come up with during the interview. You have the right to refuse to respond to any question that the interviewer has asked.

Please note that the interview will be tape-recorded and then transcribed afterwards, for the purpose of analysis, but both hard and electronic copies of the interviews will be stored by the researcher. Access will be limited to the researcher only. You still have the right to refuse to have the interview being recorded.

Once you have read this information sheet you can read and sign for the Informed Consent Form. Completing the Consent Form involves providing your name and contact detail. The researcher will keep your personal information strictly confidential and will be known only to herself. Your name and personal details will be stored securely and will not appear on any of the reports or publications that result from the research, and will be kept separate from the interview content. The responses you provide may be used in published writings in academic journals, books and in conference presentations. The interview content will then be transcribed by the researcher for further analysis, direct quotation from the transcript may be used to help illustrate a point, but you can be assured that you are not personally identifiable by the use of such quotation. (For example, any identifying name, place and institution will be changed).

If you have any concerns or questions about your privacy, then do not hesitate to contact the researcher (details at the end of this Participant Information Sheet).

Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from or stop the conversation at any time, which will not affect your status now and in the future. You are free to return another time to complete the

interview. You could also contact the researcher after the study if you have changed your mind or some ideas about the information you have provided. You may contact the researcher if you require further information about the research, and you may also contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Durham, if you wish to make a complaint relating to your involvement in the research.

Please also be aware that you may be contacted later from the interviewer for further clarification of certain responses you have provided, and also have the right to get access to findings or any publication pertaining to the interview.

This study is managed by the researcher: Miss Chen Wang

There is a dedicated email address for all queries regarding the interview: [chen.wang3@durham.ac.uk](mailto:chen.wang3@durham.ac.uk)

## Appendix D: Participant Consent Form

Project Title: Understanding the Effectiveness of the Internationalization Policy of a Chinese University on Students' Intercultural Communication Experiences

Researcher's name: Chen Wang

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.

I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.

I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.

I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential. I understand that I will be audio-recorded during the interview.

I understand that hard and electronic copies of the interviews will be stored by the researcher. Access will be limited to the researcher only.

I understand that I may contact the researcher if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Durham, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

Signed.....(Research participant)

Print name.....Date.....

Contact details

Researcher: Chen Wang

Email: chen.wang3@durham.ac.uk

Approved by Durham University's Ethics Advisory Committee

## Appendix E: Interview Guide for International Students

1. Is communicating with Chinese students or people outside the campus one of your expectations in coming to China?
2. What other expectations do you have?
3. What are your expectations about your language courses?
4. To what extent do you think your language programme helped you improve your Chinese or better communicate with Chinese people?
5. Have you found your expectations been met or not?
6. So do you have some preconceptions before you came to China?
7. Have you found any of your preconceptions has been challenged since you came to University X?
8. So through what kind of ways do you learn more about Chinese people/culture?
9. Do you think your teachers help you learn how to communicate with local people?
10. Do you think some institutional activities help you adapt to the life here?
11. Have you joined some clubs or associations?
12. Do you think you have adapted to the life here?
13. Have you ever communicated with Chinese students on campus?
14. What have you learned from her about Chinese culture?
15. What kind of activities that are organized by University X do you think more helpful for engaging foreign students with local Chinese students?
16. Would you like to live together with Chinese students?
17. Have you ever tried to find a language buddy?
18. Have you learned about Chinese culture in some informal circumstances?
19. Have you travelled a lot in China?
20. Do you think such travelling experience helps you understand Chinese culture?
21. Can you recall an interesting conversation between yourself and a person from other cultural background?
22. What have you learned from him?
23. In what ways do you think most help your understanding about communicating with Chinese people?
24. What factors do you think give rise to a closer relationship between yourself and other Chinese or international students?
25. What suggestions can you make for the institution to promote intercultural communication between international and home students?

## Appendix F: Interview Guide for Chinese Students

- 1 和外国学生交流是你来北大之前的一个预想吗？
- 2 你觉得现在已经达到你的预期了么？
- 3 你对你们的课程有什么预想嘛？
- 4 你觉得课程达到你的预期了么？
- 5 你觉得对于了解文化这个预期达到了么？
- 6 你觉得对于和外国学生交流这方面有达到你的预期吗？
- 7 你以前对某些国家有过偏见或是刻板印象么？
- 8 你觉得你现在一些刻板印象有没有什么改变？
- 9 你觉得这些发现对你自己有哪些影响？
- 10 你们的课会跟外国留学生一起上么？
- 11 你觉得外国学生和中国学生分开上课好么？
- 12 你觉得这样对于你们建立比较密切的关系有影响么？
- 13 你觉得学校有哪些促进中外学生交流的活动？
- 14 你觉得对于你了解外国文化有哪些帮助？
- 15 除了文化节以外还有其他活动是促进中外学生交流的么？
- 16 学校有哪些社团活动是促进你们中外学生交流的么？
- 17 你得所有这些活动哪个对你了解外国文化和接触外国学生帮助最大？
- 18 你有没有和学院外的外国留学生接触过？
- 19 你觉得接触外国学生对于你来说受益最大的是什么？
- 20 你跟语伴接触交流有出现过文化差异或是意见不合的时候么？
- 21 你觉得哪些因素能够促使你和外国学生关系比较紧密？
- 22 你觉得学校在促进中外学生交流这方面还有哪些需要进步的？



Interview Guide for Chinese Students (translated into English by the researcher)

1. Is communicating with international students one of your expectations of enrolling University X?
2. To what extent do you think your expectations have been met?
3. What are your expectations about your language courses?
4. Have you found your expectations have been met or not?
5. To what extent do you think your language courses helped you learn more about other cultures?
6. To what extent do you think your language courses facilitate your communication with international students?
7. Have you ever had some preconceptions of other countries?
8. Have you found that any of your preconceptions have changed after taking the language course or through communicating with international students?
9. In what ways do you think the language programme helps you learn more about other cultures or people from other countries?
10. How are your language courses organized to facilitate your integration with international students?
11. What do you think about studying and living with international students?
12. To what extent do you think a mixed-classroom environment will affect the relationship between Chinese and international students?
13. What kinds of activities are organized by University X? Do you think they are helpful for engaging foreign students with local Chinese students?
14. To what extent do you think such activities help you learn more about other cultures?
15. Have you learned about other cultures in some other informal circumstances?
16. Have you joined some clubs or associations?
17. Do you think you have gained more opportunities to meet and communicate with international students through joining the clubs/associations?
18. Have you ever communicated with international students outside the campus?
19. If yes, what have you learned from them that helps your understanding about other countries?
20. Can you recall an interesting conversation between yourself and a person from another cultural background? What have you learned from him/her?
21. What factors do you think might give rise to a closer relationship between yourself and international students?
22. What suggestions can you make for the institution to promote intercultural communication between international and home students?

## Appendix G: Two Fragments from the Semi-structured Interviews

The following two sample interview transcripts from a Chinese and an international participant respectively suggest that there was some consensus among both groups of participants with regard to the academic and social value of intercultural communication between home and international students inside the classroom.

### 1. A fragment from the interview with Chinese participant Fan

采访者：你对于和外国学生一起上课有什么看法吗？

范：如果说建立好的关系的这个是一定会有影响的。如果你上课上得多，经常聊得多，交流得多，但是可能现在这个研究生阶段吧，大家都有自己的事。确实留学生她们那边也提出来这个问题过，上次她们提出说很多通知她们都没有收到，所以在大家一起交流得时候各自都形成了各自的圈子，交流的不多。我也有些这种感受，我们平时确实没有怎么太多得去接触，除非你跟某一两个同学私人关系好，其他得交流不多，像平时上课的话，有的时候甚至相见了以后都不怎么打招呼。但是老师和留学生的关系挺好的。

Interviewer: What do you think about studying or living with international students?

Fan: It will definitely impinge on the way that we build up intimate relationships with each other. Obviously, the more opportunities that we are given to meet and communicate with each other, the closer our relationships might be. But maybe at this stage of postgraduate study, everyone has their own agenda. In fact, the international students have also raised this issue, by complaining about their failure to receive timely notifications in the same way that Chinese students do. These are the constraints that impede the international and local students from engaging with each other, and subsequently shape the way that international students tend to make friends with co-nationals. I have the same feeling with them, as we don't really have too much contact with each other, unless you have had a closer personal relationship with one or two classmates. Otherwise, it is pretty unlikely for us to have much communication on a daily basis, sometimes we don't even say hello when meeting each other by chance. However, the relationship between teachers and international students is very good.

Notes: As seen from the underlined statements, Fan was fully aware of the significant role that the international (i.e. Chinese language learning) classroom played in promoting positive intercultural contact between Chinese and intercultural students inside the classroom, which may eventually lead to more robust intercultural relationships. But the way that the classroom was structured, that is, separating international and home students into two classes, adversely restrained these two groups from meeting and communicating with each other, and as a result, led to their tendency to seek friendships with co-nationals.

### 2. A fragment from the interview with international participant James

Interviewer: What do you think about studying or living with Chinese students?

James: They need to mix Chinese students with the foreigners. In my university in Barcelona, when we are studying, the Chinese people who come to Barcelona go to the same class as us, we mix together. We made friends and studied together. But here in China, they always separate foreigners from the Chinese students, not just here, like the majority of students in this department are foreigners, even in the students' accommodation. But the students' dormitory in Europe, no matter what country they are from, the overseas students will mix together with the local students. But here in China, Chinese students live together, and the foreigners are outside. I don't know why, maybe it will change. Because China is opening, but I don't know why they separate us in class, and always separate foreigners from the Chinese students, it is so weird for me. For me it's a kind of discrimination, because we are the same, so why can't we live and study together. I told my feeling to other students in my department, people who want to learn Chinese all have this point of view. I think all the foreigners in China who want to learn Chinese I think they have the same point of view as me. I think to mix Chinese and foreign students is really a good way to improve our Chinese, and also to improve English and the international knowledge of the Chinese people.

Notes: As seen from the underlined statements, from James' point of view, the most effective way to learn a language is to live in that country and mix with its people there. The way that he used to learn a foreign language is to engage with both native and non-native speakers in the same classroom. Here the dialogic learning mode, which is appreciated and popular in most Western countries, was constrained by the absence of Chinese students in the foreign (i.e. Chinese) language class. As such, his expectation of living and studying with local students was not supported by the institutional system in this study, and may also serve as a barrier for most foreign students to improve linguistic competence and intercultural knowledge.

## Appendix H: Sample Interview Transcript

Interview with Patrick

I: Is communicating with Chinese one of your expectations in coming to China?

P: I grew up in a country with a lot of different people from a lot of different backgrounds, I spend almost my entire life in South Africa from 4 years old I lived there, so I met all kinds of different people from all kinds of backgrounds there, different levels of poverty. I was always interested in and always talk with people from a lot of different backgrounds, so coming to China is just another new experience, meeting people from so many different backgrounds, and obviously China is so big and most of the people that live in this city as well are not from this city. That's why I am glad that I came to Beijing actually because I can speak to...a sort of just be meeting with people from this city. When I first came to China two years ago, I thought that you really need to meet people from this city, but every single person I met...I met more people from outside of this city than from inside of the city, so it's just amazing me. I had no pre-expectations coming here, I didn't really know what to expect, and who I will be communicating with, and I wasn't sure if I would be only speaking to Western people or only speaking to Chinese people. But I think luckily I have managed to somehow get a bit of both, even with my teachers, I also speak with my teachers, see where they are from and what their background is, just nice to learn that sort of different things about different people.

I: So what other expectations do you have before you came to China?

P: I was expecting this city specifically is quite easy for foreigners to live. Because they have a lot of western food, and all those sort of things, so when I first came here I couldn't speak any Chinese, like none whatever. So it was really, really difficult for me to expect, because when you learn about China, when you learn Chinese you learn about the culture, you learn about what to expect. But I hadn't learned anything so I had no idea what to expect. I expected to not being speaking any English, I expected to not eat western food for a year or however long I was here for, but then you know you sort of realize if you feel... I love the food here and everything, but every time you sort of want to taste like at home, so you go to a western restaurant, and have a burger or anything. It was nice that it was against my expectations because I expected to be basically immersing in a completely different world. But I think the way China set up is very...I wasn't aware how welcoming Chinese people were, and how welcoming they were to foreigners especially. While a lot of Chinese people were so...it was just amazing things to be able to come here and think I feel welcomed here, and people are...I think in another way around, a lot of Chinese, if you walked up to China I had no idea I thought people would hate me because I couldn't speak Chinese, that was my expectation. But I went to a shop, my first three weeks of staying in this city, I was so nervous and said 'how much is this?' And they were so amazed that because they see foreigners could speak Chinese. But if Chinese person goes to another country, and they speak English, and that English person doesn't even mind. I wasn't expecting Chinese people to be as welcoming as they are.

I: What are your expectations for your language course?

P: I wasn't sure actually. Because I never studied Chinese formally, my major in university is not Chinese, but is business. I only studies Chinese at a language college, but there was no exams, it was just sort of learning Chinese basically, no test or anything, just dictation but it was not a big test. So I was quite excited to come here, and study in a formal sense, because I thought it is just completely different opportunity, I sort of expected it to be big, big classes with hundreds of students, but my class has 12 people in it, completely different to what I expected. Because back home, for example, I am really used to have big classes, some my economic lectures back home have 200 or even 300 people, so that's the sort of lecture I am used to. And I come here and have a class with 12 people, it is nothing wrong with it, it's just amazing to have only 12 people in my class. I specifically work better in a smaller class environment, where it's a bit more personal with the teacher, and you don't feel as nervous with a smaller class of

people. So I expected it to be a lot of work, and a lot more serious, but it is not that serious, but I was expecting teachers to be very, very strict and very serious, teachers are still people, they still have the...you could still talk to them about what it was like back home. I think it's completely different, the language teachers are so...they teach Chinese as a second language, they are so different to my normal economic lecturer or accounting lecturer, they are just so different... It's more personal relationship I feel, so I wasn't expecting to have that sort of relationship with my teachers but you still feel you can chat with them. Because my lecturers back home would never know my name, there were so many people in a class, so it's hard for your teacher to even know your name. In my university, tens of thousands of people I was expecting to be just to have massive class of people and the teacher shouting at you from far away, and massive lectures here, but it is really small classroom, I prefer it is like, it is much much more, and it's just the way the teacher teaches as well, it's really, really incredible, where in the best university in China, so it's what you expect, you expect great teachers and they have got great teachers.

I: Have you found your language programme helped you improve your Chinese or better communicate with Chinese people?

P: My goal when I first came here was to...before I came, was to do a HSK5 by the time I left, because I hadn't done it. In a very long future goal, by the time I am 25 years old, do HSK6. My goal of HSK5 has changed now, because I am now focusing on my studies. So I am just going to focus on my Chinese language and just practice a lot, and just everything. I know a lot of people when they study Chinese they say spoken is the most important, or written is the most important, I feel they all interlink, if you can write it you can read it. If you can speak it a lot of times, you can understand it as well. So for me I feel like all four aspects of reading, writing, speaking and listening, are so important in terms of Chinese. So my goals are basically just to as a whole keep improving. What I love about learning Chinese is you learn about the culture, so just keep learning about the culture, and different smaller cities that maybe when I was here last year, I did learn about. So basically whatever advice I give to people to come to China...sometimes I make mistakes and I make a lot of mistakes with my Chinese, because you make the mistake, you learn from your mistake. So my goal is to make these mistakes and then learn from them here, because in a future situation I won't make the mistakes anymore. So one of my goals is just to make sure I make most of my opportunities here, and sort of just keep learning. I learned so much by myself when I was here, I just learn so many new things by myself and another people, and not only Chinese culture as well. Because people from my classroom are from Russia, Japan, Hungary, so I meet people from so many different countries, coming to school like this, so it is not only Chinese culture, you broaden your horizons in the entire world.

I: You say make the most of your opportunities, so what kind of opportunities do you mean?

G: Obviously language course, because back home there were very few opportunities to speak Chinese. So I don't have any Chinese friend back home. But now I have got a few Chinese friends, and I still keep in touch with my all the Chinese teachers, I speak to them all the time. I lived this city in 2013, I studied Chinese here for a year, at a school called International Chinese College, a small language college. So I studied there, the way I speak to my teachers most days, because they still help with my Chinese, they practice Chinese with me. So I think that's also why I don't have a language partner, because I have got Chinese friends who I also speak to most days and I chat with them in that sort of sense. So they are not only my friends, but they are also my language partners as well. Because I also help them with English some time. I have got opportunities now as well living in South Africa I think a lot of people don't understand what the country is like, so I feel like I have got almost a duty to let everyone know what it actually is like, because 90% of the time, I am on the street and someone asks me where are you from, I am actually from England, but I say I am from South Africa, because I have lived there my whole life. So every single person says to me but you are not black. Because I am a white person from South Africa, I think I have got an opportunity here to educate people on my part of world, while I can learn about their part of world as well.

I: Have you found your expectations been met or not?

P: Some of them have. One of my goals was to educate people on South Africa, just to casually show people what South Africa is like, so many people say South Africa is so dangerous, but it is not, it's not that dangerous. So some people I met have learned more about my country, but I have also I feel like I grew up as a person, as a student as well. I have learned a lot by myself, a lot about other people, that's sort of expectation I have. Because I told myself that if I go somewhere, I will go somewhere to learn, even it is informally learned, I want to learn something interesting, so I feel like I have learned which is a good expectation. That's sort of expectations have been met. Some of them haven't. Like smaller things, like the size of the classes, and that sort of thing, and such as the free time that I have, and the relationship with teachers, that was a bit different to what I expected, but other than that, pretty much everything has met my expectations I guess.

I: What kind of your expectations have not been met?

G: Like the relationship with the teachers. I thought the class situation would be... I was expecting it to be a lot more serious, like the students are a bit more serious, not want to speak to anybody often in class. But everybody's friend with everybody, it's really nice. And the kind of person you like to meet, a lot of different people. So it is nice that my expectation has not been met. Because I was expecting to spend everyday, every minute in my room studying. But they make sure you have got free time, you are here in China to not just learn Chinese, you are here to learn about the culture as well. So that is a good thing to me. I didn't expect it to be like that.

I: What do you think helps you most for improving your Chinese or understanding Chinese culture?

G: I think I need to... everyone says I need to watch the Chinese television and Chinese movies, because I feel like that helps a lot. I haven't watched a lot of Chinese movies, I haven't watched too many of them. For ones I have watched I feel like I have learned something from every single one of them. I also learn a bit more about Chinese culture. Such as the movie 'Anchoring in Seattle', about the lady who goes to America to give birth. I didn't know that happens a lot in China, but I have learned that a lot of Chinese ladies go to the America to give birth and then their child is the citizen of the U.S. So that sort of thing. It helps with learning my Chinese, I learned all these terminology for this sort of thing. And I think speaking to Chinese people helps a lot, because you learn things that make you sound a little bit more local, you don't sound like much of foreigner when you speak Chinese. I have a list of phrases, that are at the moment quite popular. Just likes terms I would never learn in class, such as 'Suhuashuodehao' (i.e. There goes a saying that/As the saying goes). I have never learned that in class, but I have learned it from friends and from speaking to people on the street. Such as the phrase 'baogebagua', I don't know what it means, I'm not sure exactly what it means, but it means 'to drop the bomb, to let someone on some news', I have got the character here for you to look at. I have a list of all these words and phrases basically on my phone. I haven't got too many yet. One of my favorite one is when someone says 'your Chinese is excellent, you are an old China hand (zhongguotong)'. I would say 'No, no, I haven't even known very well about the Haidian District'. Like that sort of thing, I have never learned that from my teacher, the teacher will never teach that sort of thing. So I feel like speaking more like local Chinese makes you feel a little bit like my Chinese is improving in that sort of sense. Because formal Chinese is good, but it is also nice to be able to chat with Chinese people, and speak more like them, as the person speaking like a westerner, like a foreign person speaking Chinese.

I: Would you like to learn Chinese in formal or informal situation?

P: I think both are necessary. So my end goal for Chinese is to be able to do business here in Chinese language, to be able to work here, and do business in Chinese. So I would need formal Chinese for that, but if you want to live here, you need to speak a bit more like local Chinese, while you don't need to, but I feel more comfortable in the place when I can speak more local Chinese, I can speak more like local people, and make them feel more comfortable as well.

I: So did you have some preconceptions before you came to China?

P: I didn't realize that Chinese people were so warm and welcoming. Chinese people are so friendly. I just thought that everyone was so serious here, but everybody has a great time, I never really knew much about China before I came here, I sort of I had no expectations, knew nothing. I think it was made a little bit easier for me because I went to Hongkong before I came to mainland China. So I think it was a small step, and then a big step into actual mainland China. So I feel that I didn't really have many preconceptions. I like to keep an open mind, so I sort of go into something without judging and let me rather experience the place first and then I can make a conclusion as what I feel about the place. So I didn't really have many preconceptions, I am open to anything, and I knew what I need to be in China.

I: Do you think your experience in Hongkong affected your impression about Chinese people?

P: I think people in Hongkong are very different to people from mainland China. Obviously because until 1997, Hongkong was a British colony, was run by Britain, and then in 1997, it was given back to China. So I think they still that sort of British influencing Hongkong. There are so many foreigners, so many western people in Hongkong. So I feel that obviously it is China, but you don't feel like you are in China when you are in Hongkong. I feel like I am in a western city when I was in Hongkong, because it is just all western restaurants everywhere, so I don't feel like I am in China as much as I do here. It is a bad thing to feel like I am in China, I love feeling I can be in China.

I: What kind of things that make you think that Chinese people are serious?

P: I did think so before I came here. I don't know actually I think just growing up, when you were younger you hear little snippets of what is actually going, you don't really hear what's exactly going on in the world. You have no idea what's going on in a country before you have been here. The whole stereotype of Chinese school child who goes to school very earlier, and gets home really, really late at night, and just studies the whole time. Not all the Chinese people are like that, every country has students like that, so every country has people like that as well, so you sort of get the impression that all Chinese people are like that, but they are not. Chinese people are so welcoming, so friendly, fine, just a lot different to what most people expect. I have got friends back home and ask me 'why do you keep going to China? You are crazy.' They have never been to China before. So if they came here, they will love it. But they have just never been to China so they... But I tell them all the time that China is such a easy place to live, you don't need Facebook, Facebook is not the most important thing as it was.

I: Do you think your stereotypes have changed since you came to China?

P: Yeah, not necessarily PU. But I think because I had already lived here for a year, so I knew what Chinese people were like already.

I: So through what kind of ways do you learn more about Chinese people?

P: Learning Chinese because obviously each new lesson is on a completely different topic, so I learn about sport in China, about food, food is such a rich heritage in China, so rich history in China. Food is so important in China. So I learn so much about food, about the most amazing things in these lessons when you saw the different topics basically. So that speaking to my teachers about where they are from, we have got teachers from Shenyang, and Nanyang, we have also got teacher who is from this city as well. So I have also learned what LaoBeijing is like as well. That sort of things.

I: What topics you usually have with your teacher?

P: Just about what everyday life is like. Because as a foreign student, you don't get to see, as a student here we live in the Global Village, which is luxury (environment). We don't get to see what people would find as 'laobaixing' (ordinary people), just a normal person on the street, what they do, and what they like...you don't know what they are doing. I always walk on the street, I see I wonder what that person is just for living. So speaking to your teachers, you learn what their everyday life is like, and even though they live in luxury, but they have before lived a life just like a normal person who...they don't speak any

English, just like someone who is on the street, you wonder what they do, just that sort of thing, that's nice to learn just what normal everyday life in China is like.

I: Do you think your teachers help you learn how to communicate with local people?

P: Yeah, they did, they did a lot. I think it's just what you learn when you learn a language. Because when you learn the language you learn the words like 'please, thank you'. I think the classic things that all foreigners find really funny is when you are in a small crowded restaurant, you have to shout the waiters' name. Quite early on I went for lunch with a Chinese person, for the first time, it's quite surprising. But later you are aware that's how you have to get the attention of the waiter. So like you seat there having lunch with them for the first time, you just hear them shout the waiter, which is really surprising, but you realize that's how you have got to do, so those sort of things. You hear it once, then that sticks to my mind forever. The first time I had a meal in China, I went to a dumpling restaurant with my teachers for lunch at my school, I hear them shout the waiter. That sort of thing about how you communicate with people in some ways. Even in class, I am very used to be quite quiet in class, but the teachers often ask me to speak 'louder, louder, louder', because it's hard for them to hear me when they are teaching.

I: Do you often go lunch with your Chinese friends?

P: Not as often as I would like to. But I try to see my Chinese teacher, she lives very far away, she lives in Sanlitun. My old Chinese teacher from 2013. So it's quite difficult to see her. And I have a friend whose wife is Chinese, he is from England. So I go and see the for lunch, and I practice Chinese with her, she teaches me things. She is very caring, she shows to treat me like her child. I am ten years younger than she is. So she treats me like her child, she is always taking care of me, making sure I have got something to eat and drink. Those sort of things that Chinese people like.

I: Do you think some institutional activities help you adapt to the life here?

P: Yes, they have the campus tour, in which they show you around the campus at the very beginning of the semester. I think it was organized by one of the language partner programmes, but anybody could go, it was a trip to a forest park outside of the city, it was a language partner thing, where there were both Chinese and western students, you met a lot of western students and Chinese people there.

I: Have you joined some clubs or associations?

P: I have joined a football team. It's a club, so I represent my department, we play against Chinese students. I really, really like soccer, it's one of my favorite things, I really love it. I learn even some little things, because we play against Chinese students from the school of physics, chemistry, mathematics, all sorts of different schools. I hear the Chinese people say even little things like 'Haoqiu' (i.e. good job), so I know how they say the phrase 'good job' (in Chinese) when they play soccer. So I can say that later. Those sort of things. So it is still language opportunities, even though I don't communicate with them much, just little language opportunities like that.

I: Have you learned some Chinese custom?

P: Yeah, actually my friends of mine, like the Chinese ladies always go to take your shoes for you to get into the apartment, even here I always wear my shoes outside, I wear my slippers inside. So that sort of thing. Little things as well like you don't leave your chopsticks in your rice, never do that, so little things like that.

I: Do you think you have adapted to the life here?

P: Yeah, I think I have. I think as international students we have very easy life, it is made easy for us. Like in the student accommodation, even in the convenient store over there, people could speak English, so you don't have to be able to speak Chinese. If I go to live in Zhangjiajie, I just went to live there and



taught English for a year. I would really struggle, it would be really difficult, because no one could be able to speak English. It's so nice to be able to speak English to people here, to feel safe and comfortable. I feel like being thrown in a deep inn, storing at the hottest point, this is sort of deep and different, but it is quite easy to live in the city, because it's one of the biggest cities in the world, and it's a really international city, so chances are that most places you find someone who can speak English.

I: Would you prefer to stick to friends from western countries, or to Chinese friends

P: Personally, I like to have both. I have a lot of Japanese students in my class, they can't really speak English. So our mutual language is Chinese, so I speak Chinese to them as well. We practice our Chinese together. It is just nice to be able to speak English to some people when I get tired of speaking Chinese all day everyday, so it's nice to be able to seek to speak English.

I: Is there any different feelings between communicating with people who can speak English and with those who can't?

P: I feel obviously a lot more comfortable with English-speaking people. But I like to be challenged, so I feel like speaking to people in Chinese is great, especially when Chinese is not their first language as well. It is interesting because it is difficult conversation to have with...because we can speak Chinese but our Chinese is not incredible, but it's ok. So we can communicate with each other in Chinese. It is a really nice challenge to have that.

I: Have you ever communicated with Chinese students on campus?

P: Yes, I have a few, but not many. So for instance, I don't think she is actually a part of our school, but she is a Chinese girl and works in international relations, she organizes our football team. So I speak to her quite often, she is also like my language partner. I speak to other people's language partner as well.

I: What have you learned from her about Chinese culture?

P: One thing inquiry recently, I don't speak to her very much, one day we walk pass through each other, I said to her 'How are you?' But she said I should say 'How are you recently?' It's a bit more polite to say like that, to not walk and pass, and just say 'How are you?' Just to be able to be more polite to say 'How are you doing recently?'.

I: What kind of activities that organized by the university are more helpful for engaging foreign students with local Chinese students?

P: I think the soccer competition is quite good. Because it helps us...like we play against Chinese people all the time, and actually sometimes we play with Chinese people. I actually have a football practice after class today, there will probably be Chinese people coming to play with us today.

I: What have you learned from them?

P: I wouldn't really say I have learned much from them, but it's just nice to be able to interact with Chinese students a little bit. I don't feel like I have learned much from them, because I don't speak to them very much. But it is just nice to feel that I am not just hanging and spending my time with foreign people all the time. Because I am in class with foreign students, and I am living with foreign students.

I: Do you like such kind of condition to study and live only with international students?

P: Yes and no. Because some aspects are nice. Because I think there will be less problems because obviously western cultures and Chinese culture are a little bit different, I am not sure specifically how it would work, but I think if there were Chinese and local students here, there will be a lot of arguments and fighting, because of the different customs and everything, like some people might think the foreign students are being too loud, some people might think the Chinese students are being too loud. I think it

just gets a little bit...there could be problems I think if Chinese students and western students live together.

I: How about studying together?

P: I think it depends on studying what. I actually will be quite excited to come back here, I would like to do my postgraduate here. I am not sure what in, but after I graduate from the university back home, then come here and do a postgraduate here, study in Chinese with Chinese students in another department.

I: Have you ever tried to find a language buddy?

P: Yeah, I do have one, but I don't see her very often. I think we are both very busy, sometimes I feel with language partners, I often don't feel that comfortable with them, because it's like something forced, it's not natural. You feel like you have to do it. Unless they are your friend, and then you don't have to do it. So that's why I'd like to speak to my teachers, because we are friends, my old teachers are my friends, so we chat about any thing. And we have similar interests.

I: Have you learned about Chinese culture in some informal circumstances?

P: The class will teach you on a whole, but then going to speak to Chinese people is more specific I guess. I love learning something in class and going to try on the street to someone. Just like Chinese phrases, because we learn Chinese, I learned this Chinese phrase a long time ago, like 'Zanmenxiangdaoyikuaiqile' (we think on the same tempo), but that doesn't necessarily mean we're going together. 'What do you want to eat? I want to have Baozi. Oh, we are thinking the same thought'. Those are like quite colloquial Chinese. I think in the spoken class I learn a lot of things, because Hanyu is obviously a lot more about writing, you don't learn as many like colloquial words or everything as in spoken class.

I: Have you encountered some cultural shock?

P: Nothing too bad, but sometimes like little things in shops, if I say it isn't like a big conflict, it is something just difficult to communicate with them. So some people from the south, they will say 'Sikuai' (ten yuan), but I hear it is 'four', but they mean 'ten', so those sort of things, not necessarily people from this city, but people who come more from the south, when they speak with a little bit more accent.

I: Have you found any difference between your point of view and those of the Chinese people?

P: Not really too much. For instance I think people in China move very quickly, and want to get to where they want to get to. I went to Dalian a couple of weeks ago for the Labor's Day holiday. I got off the train, it was 10 o'clock at night, it was really late and tired. I was waiting for a taxi, I stood in front of the taxi and some lady just walked in front of me, because I was in front of her, we were lining up and she just thought it was ok for her to just push right in front of me. So I said to her 'Do you know how to line up?' She start screaming at me. I was really tired so I decided not to argue with her.

I: Have you traveled a lot in China?

P: Quite a bit. Quite a few different cities. I spent two weeks travelling in China in 2013. I have been to Guilin and Yangshuo. My father lives in Hongkong, so I go to Hongkong every six months or so, I get there quite often. I have also been to Zhangjiajie, Xi'an, Neimenggu, Dalian, Tianjin, Shanghai.

I: Do you think such travelling experience helps you understand Chinese culture?

P: Sometimes. When I was in Zhangjiajie, I really struggled to understand people, because their accent is so strong, they never speak Mandarin. It's really difficult to understand what people were saying to me.

But other than that, in Dalian, sometimes the older people still speak more Dalian dialect, so it's difficult to understand them as well. But I think now in China, it's developing to a stage with the whole country pretty much all the young people speak Mandarin. So it's not as difficult to communicate with people in comparison to what I was a few years ago.

I: Can you recall an interesting conversation between yourself and a person from other cultural background?

P: My next door neighbor is from Tajikistan, he has lived in China for 10 years now. He can speak the most incredible Chinese, I see him as a Chinese person, I speak Chinese to him. His writing is like in the Middle East. He is such a nice guy to talk to.

I: What have you learned from him?

P: I learned a lot of phrases from him, such as 'as the saying goes...' 'You are a China hand', 'No, no, I have not even known very well about the Haidian District'. Just more local ways to speak Chinese people.

I: In what ways do you think most help your understanding about communicating with Chinese people?

P: I am quite careful about what's good to say and what's not good to say. I am not sure all the time if I said the right thing. So I need to be careful with what I say sometimes.

I: What would you like to do when you encounter problems with communicating with Chinese people?

P: I was actually speaking to someone about this yesterday. I really don't like conflict, I am quite a gentle person, so I like to avoid fighting with people or anything. I know in China you have the tradition of 'losing face', but to me I don't feel like I am not worried about that. So I will often just say 'sorry', that's it, I try to avoid most conflicts, unless it's really bad. Like in Dalian, when the lady pushed me back in the line for instance. I was really tired and I am not usually like that. Because I was tired and everyone has been waiting for ages, and she thought it was ok to in front of the line. So that was the only time I really have conflict. Most times I just put up my hand, and say it was my fault.



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